

The 2005 National School Climate Survey

The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay,
Bisexual and Transgender Youth
in Our Nation's Schools



A Report from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network
www.glsen.org

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The **Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network** is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students. Established nationally in 1995, GLSEN envisions a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

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PREFACE

Earlier this year I shared a stage with Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack who publicly called on his state's policymakers to adopt comprehensive and effective legislation to address the problems of bullying and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The capacity crowd of more than 500 Iowa high school students and their teachers roared approval as television cameras from across the state captured the moment.

I wish more states were like Iowa, and more elected leaders were like Tom Vilsack.

That day's powerful demonstration of leadership and support was a unique one. More often than not, legislators have blocked bills like the one Governor Vilsack supports. Separate legislation in Arizona, Georgia, Idaho, Missouri, Utah and Virginia this year sought to discourage or ban students from forming school clubs to address harassment, while local school boards nationwide have tried to eliminate lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, history and issues from school libraries and curriculum.

The results of GLSEN's fourth biennial National School Climate Survey (NSCS), the only national survey concerning the school experiences of students who identify as LGBT, should be a guide for every legislator, educator, school board and community leader concerned with ensuring safe and effective schools for ALL students.

The 2005 NSCS contains important results that are distressing and at the same time, reveal seeds of hope. On the positive front, this data

shows that schools can and, in some cases are improving the climate so that LGBT students can better access educational opportunities. Inclusive policies, supportive school staff, the presence of student clubs dealing with LGBT issues (commonly known as “Gay-Straight Alliances” or GSAs), and positive inclusion of LGBT issues in school curricula all have a significant positive impact on the experience of LGBT students. The report shows how these resources can benefit LGBT students—lowered rates of name-calling and harassment, decreased absenteeism, an increased sense of school safety and school belonging, and higher grade point averages.

Given that such positive outcomes are what we wish for all students, the fact that these positive interventions are so rarely implemented is dismaying. In short, not enough schools are “doing the right thing.”

The findings of the 2005 NSCS beg the question of why more states and districts are not doing what is needed to enable more LGBT students to succeed. While it begs that question, it cannot answer it. For that answer, readers must turn to their state legislators, principals, school boards, and district superintendents and ask them why they aren’t doing the right thing.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin Jennings". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kevin" and last name "Jennings" clearly distinguishable.

Kevin Jennings
Founder & Executive Director, GLSEN



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GLSEN's National School Climate Survey is the only national survey to document the experiences of students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) in America's secondary schools. Conducted biennially since 1999, the National School Climate Survey (NSCS) fills a crucial void in our collective understanding of the contemporary high school experience. The results of this survey are intended to inform educators, policymakers and the public at large, as part of GLSEN's ongoing effort to ensure that all schools are places where students are free to learn, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

The 2005 NSCS results summarized here continue to track the endemic problem of name-calling, harassment and violence directed at LGBT students, while offering information about the impact of these experiences on academic performance and the effect of interventions designed to address the underlying problem. In particular, the 2005 survey data allowed us to examine the role that state education legislation has in creating (or not creating) safer schools for all students, including LGBT students. The 2005 NSCS paints a disturbing picture of the school experiences of LGBT students. However, it also provides further insight into the solutions for creating safer schools for all students.

Methods

In order to obtain a more representative sample of LGBT youth, we used two methods to locate possible participants. First, participants were obtained through community-based groups or service organizations serving LGBT youth. Fifty groups/organizations were randomly selected from a list of over 300. Each group was then invited to participate in the survey, and surveys were sent for the youth to complete. Of the 50 groups, 39 were able to have youth complete the survey and a total of 381 surveys were obtained through this method. In addition, we also attempted to have greater representation of LGBT youth from states in the South and Midwest, which have historically been underrepresented in our past surveys. An additional 14 groups or organizations had youth complete the survey, providing an additional 140 surveys. Thus, a total of 521 paper surveys were collected using this first method. Our second method was to make the National School Climate Survey available online through GLSEN's website. Notices about the survey were posted on listservs and websites oriented to LGBT youth. Notices were also emailed to GLSEN chapters and to youth advocacy organizations such as Advocates for Youth and Youth Guardian Services. To ensure representation of transgender youth and youth of color, special efforts were made to notify groups and organizations that work predominantly with these populations about the on-line survey. A total of 1,211 surveys were completed online. Data collection through community based groups and service organizations occurred from April to July 2005. Data collection through the online version occurred from April to August 2005.

The sample consisted of a total of 1,732 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students between the ages of 13 and 20. Students were from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Excluded from the final total were youth who were not in a K-12 school during the 2004-2005 school year, youth who were not in school in the United States, and heterosexual youth (except for those who were also transgender). A majority of the sample (69.2%) was white and a little more than half (52.2%) was female. About two-thirds of the sample (62.4%) specifically identified as gay or lesbian and more than half (59.5%) were in the 11th or 12th grades.

Key Findings

The Scope of the Problem

Biased Remarks in School. The results of the 2005 survey indicate that anti-LGBT language, as well as bullying and harassment on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression, remain common in America's schools. Respondents to the 2005 NSCS reported that homophobic remarks were the most common type of biased language heard at school, with three-quarters of the students (75.4%) hearing remarks such as "faggot" or "dyke" frequently or often at school. Even more pervasive was the use of the expression "that's so

gay” or “you’re so gay,” often used to indicate that something or someone is stupid or worthless. Nearly nine out of ten (89.2%) students reported hearing these comments frequently or often at school. Although less pervasive than homophobic remarks, other forms of biased language, including sexist and racist remarks and negative remarks about students’ gender expression, were also commonly heard at school.

Students most often reported that homophobic remarks were made in school when faculty or other school staff were not present. Yet when present, faculty and other school staff often failed to act. Only 16.5% reported that staff who were present when homophobic remarks were made intervened frequently when they heard such language. In fact, students reported that school staff were less likely to intervene regarding homophobic remarks or remarks about gender expression than racist or sexist remarks.

The problem goes beyond the failure of faculty and school staff to address homophobic language in school. Some school staff contributed to this problem by making homophobic remarks themselves—nearly a fifth (18.6%) of the survey respondents reported hearing homophobic remarks from their teachers or other school staff.

Harassment and Assault. Unfortunately, anti-LGBT behavior is not confined to the use of biased language. Overall, three-quarters (74.2%) of students in the survey reported feeling unsafe in school because of personal characteristics, such as their sexual orientation, gender or religion. Nearly two-thirds (64.3%) reported feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation specifically, and 40.7% felt unsafe because of how they expressed their gender. The majority of students in our survey also experienced harassment and violence at school—nearly two-thirds (64.1%) reported that they had been verbally harassed at least some of the time in school in the past year because of their sexual orientation and about half (45.5%) because of their gender expression. Over a third (37.8%) of students had also experienced physical harassment at school on the basis of sexual orientation and a quarter (26.1%) on the basis of their gender expression. Although incidents of physical assault were less common, nearly a fifth (17.6%) of students had been physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation and over a tenth (11.8%) because of their gender expression. About two-thirds of LGBT students reported having ever been sexually harassed (e.g., sexual remarks made, being touched inappropriately) in school in the past year.

In addition to these forms of harassment and assault, most of the LGBT students in our survey reported relational aggression (such as being the target of mean rumors or lies), and having their property damaged or stolen. More than a third (41.2%) of students also reported some instance in the past year of “cyberbullying”—receiving threatening or harassing e-mails or text messages from other students.

It is important to note that these reports from LGBT students about their experiences with harassment are corroborated by reports from the general population of students. In a recent national study of the general secondary school student population conducted by GLSEN and Harris Interactive, 62.5% of students reported that other students were called names or harassed at their school on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, which was quite similar to the 64.1% of LGBT students surveyed in the 2005 NSCS who reported experiencing such harassment.

Reporting Harassment/Assault to School Personnel and Family Members. Unfortunately, many LGBT students who experienced harassment or assault in school may feel that they have nowhere to turn. A majority of students in our 2005 survey who had been harassed or assaulted in school never reported the incidents to school authorities (58.6%), parents or guardians (55.1%), or other family members (62.6%). For some students, reporting the harassment did not necessarily effect any positive changes in their school experience. With regard to reporting to family members, more than a third (43.6%) of the students reported that their parent or guardian took no action after being informed of the harassment and over 70% (71.1%) reported that other family members never intervened. Less than half (43.8%) of students who reported incidents of victimization to school staff said that the actions taken by school authorities to address the situation were effective.

Changes in Harassment/Assault Over Time. There have been some small but significant decreases in rates of harassment and assault since our 2001 survey. Students in 2003 and 2005 reported a lower incidence of physical harassment and assault related to sexual orientation than in 2001, although there was no change from 2003 to the present. Rates of verbal harassment related to sexual orientation have unfortunately remained unchanged since 2001, as was the case with any type of harassment or assault related to gender expression.

Academic Engagement, Aspirations and Achievement

The prevalence of various forms of anti-LGBT behavior in schools has a detrimental impact on LGBT students' school experiences and can affect academic achievement. For example, over a quarter (28.9%) of students had skipped a day of school in the past month because of feeling unsafe, and an equal number had skipped a class at least once in the past month for the same reason.

Students who had experienced more serious harassment or assault were even more likely to skip school or classes. For example, students who had been physically harassed because of their sexual orientation or physically harassed or assaulted because of their gender expression were about three times as likely to have skipped a day of school in the past month. Comparing the LGBT students in the 2005 NSCS with students from the study of the general secondary school

student population conducted by GLSEN and Harris Interactive, LGBT students were more than five times more likely to report having skipped a day of school in the past month than the general population of students.

This pervasive sense of jeopardy in school may contribute to disparities in educational aspirations between LGBT students and their peers. Comparing 2005 NSCS data with a study of the general secondary school population conducted in 2004 by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), LGBT students were twice as likely as the NCES national sample to say that they were not planning on completing high school or going on to college. Within the 2005 NSCS sample, LGBT students who experienced more frequent verbal or physical harassment on the basis of sexual orientation or gender expression were more likely to report that they did not plan to go on to college than those LGBT students who were not subject to such harassment.

The severity of students' experiences of harassment directly correlates with lower academic achievement. Students who reported more frequent harassment on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender expression also reported significantly lower grade point averages (GPAs) than students who experienced less frequent harassment. The disparity was particularly striking in the case of physical harassment: the average GPA for students who were frequently physically harassed because of their sexual orientation was half a grade lower than that of other students (2.6 versus 3.1).

Intervention and Support

Another dimension of school climate for LGBT youth is the availability of positive resources about LGBT-related issues and of supportive faculty or staff. In the 2005 NSCS, we included several questions designed to provide data on the availability of such interventions and their impact on school climate for LGBT students.

School Policies for Reporting Harassment. Having a policy or procedure for reporting incidents of harassment in school is an important tool for making schools safer for all students. While a majority of the students surveyed (68.3%) reported that their school had a policy for reporting incidents of harassment and assault, less than a quarter of all respondents (22.2%) attended a school with a policy that specifically mentioned sexual orientation, and only a tenth (10%) were at a school with a policy that mentioned gender identity/expression.

When such policies or procedures exist and are enforced, schools are sending a message to the student population that victimizing behaviors will not be tolerated. Having a comprehensive school policy—one that specifically mentioned sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression—was related to a lower incidence of hearing homophobic remarks, and to lower rates of verbal harassment. Students at schools with comprehensive policies also reported higher

rates of intervention by school staff when homophobic remarks were made. They were also much more likely to report harassment to school authorities who, in turn, were more likely to respond effectively.

Supportive School Personnel. Supportive school staff can make a tremendous difference in the experience of LGBT students. Nine out of ten students surveyed knew at least one member of their school's staff who was supportive of LGBT students. The presence of supportive staff contributed to a range of positive indicators, including greater sense of safety, fewer reports of missing days of school, a greater sense of belonging at school, and higher incidence of planning to attend college. The results further indicated that having a "critical mass" of supportive staff, more than simply one or two, is what may produce the best outcomes for LGBT students. For example, with regard to feeling unsafe at school, students who knew of many supportive staff at their school were much less likely to report feeling unsafe than their peers who did not have any supportive staff, yet there was no difference between those students who had no supportive staff and those who only had one or two.

Student Clubs. For many LGBT students and their allies, clubs that address LGBT student issues, such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), may offer critical support. Nearly half (47.2%) of the students surveyed reported that their school had a GSA. The presence of these clubs did indeed have a positive relationship to student experiences. Students in schools with a GSA were less likely to feel unsafe, less likely to miss school, and more likely to feel that they belonged at their school than students in schools with no such clubs.

Resources and Curriculum. An inclusive curriculum—one that provides positive representations of LGBT history, people and events—may promote a more positive learning environment for LGBT students. Yet the vast majority (81.7%) of students reported that they had never been taught about LGBT people, history or events in school. Furthermore, the majority of those who had learned something about these issues in school reported that representations of LGBT issues were somewhat or very positive, and those students exposed to such positive representations were much less likely than their peers to miss school because of feeling unsafe. In addition, they demonstrated a greater sense of school belonging.

Results from the 2005 survey showed a significant negative impact from another element of school curriculum that has become more common over the past few years—abstinence-only health education, i.e. health or sex education programs that promote sexual abstinence until marriage. Nearly half (44.6%) of the students surveyed reported that their school followed an abstinence-only health curriculum, and these students were more likely to have experienced verbal harassment on the basis of sexual orientation, and were more likely to have missed school in the past month because they felt unsafe. Students at schools that followed an abstinence-only curriculum also reported having fewer supportive faculty/school staff.

Students responding to the 2005 NSCS reported few changes in access to resources and support compared to the 2003 NSCS respondents. Whereas in the 2003 NSCS, we saw substantial gains from 2001 in the number of students who had GSAs at their schools, there was a small decrease from 2003 to 2005. Nevertheless, the number of students in 2005 who had GSAs in their schools continued to be higher than in 2001. Similarly, the percentage of students who could identify supportive teachers or who would feel comfortable discussing LGBT issues with a teacher, principals and/or school counselors increased from 2001 to 2003 but dropped slightly in 2005. The availability of LGBT-related information in school, either in the library or via the school Internet, decreased from 2001 to 2003 and remained unchanged from 2003 to 2005.

State Legislation about LGBT Issues in Education. State legislation regarding LGBT issues in education also shapes school climate. Seven states currently have legislation in place that prohibits the positive portrayal of homosexuality in schools. Students from these states were more likely to report higher incidences of homophobic remarks and experiences of verbal harassment in school than students from other states. Not surprisingly, students in these states were also less likely to have access to supportive resources, such as a GSA or LGBT resources in the library or via the school Internet.

In contrast, nine states and the District of Columbia prohibit discrimination or harassment on the basis of sexual orientation, and four of those states also include protections on the basis of gender identity. Students in those states experienced significantly lower rates of verbal harassment than their peers. Nine other states have generic “anti-bullying” laws that do not specifically define “bullying” or list the categories of prohibited behaviors. The rates of verbal harassment in those states were no different than the rates in states with no law at all, and both were significantly higher than the rates in states with specific legislative language.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of the 2005 National School Climate Survey demonstrate that school continues to be a dangerous place for many LGBT students. The majority of the students whom we surveyed heard homophobic remarks frequently, felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and had experienced verbal harassment at school. Many also reported experiencing physical harassment, physical assault and sexual harassment at school.

It is particularly discouraging to note that there has not been consistent progress on the issue of LGBT students’ safety in school since our 2003 survey. In fact, the most widespread indicators of a hostile climate for LGBT students—hearing the expression “that’s so gay” used in school and direct verbal harassment because of one’s sexual orientation—remain unchanged since 2001. And in a climate where many states have increasingly sought to ban GSAs specifically, stu-

dent reports of having a GSA in their school have dropped slightly since 2003, and fewer students have access to information about LGBT issues via the Internet.

There are indications that students in specific schools (or even states) where positive steps have been taken have experienced concrete improvements to school climate. However, those students remain in the minority. While some states, districts and individual schools have made progress in implementing supportive policies or providing in-school support, the majority of our nation's students are not covered by comprehensive legislation or policy, nor do they have access to school resources supportive of LGBT students.

It is clear that there is an urgent need for action to create a safer school climate for all students. The 2005 NSCS illustrates the ways in which the presence of effective legislation or policy and in-school resources and supports can have beneficial effects on school climate, students' sense of safety, and, ultimately, on students' academic achievement and educational aspirations. There are steps that all concerned stakeholders can take to remedy the situation:

- **Advocate** for comprehensive anti-bullying and anti-discrimination legislation at the state and federal level that specifically enumerate sexual orientation and gender identity/expression as protected categories alongside others such as race, faith and age;
- **Adopt and implement** comprehensive anti-bullying policies in individual schools and districts, with clear and effective systems for reporting and addressing incidents that students experience;
- **Support** student clubs, such as GSAs, that address LGBT issues in education;
- **Provide training** for school staff to improve rates of intervention and increase the number of supportive faculty and staff available to students; and
- **Increase** student access to appropriate and accurate information regarding LGBT people, history and events. Taken together, such measures can move us towards a future in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

INTRODUCTION



The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender¹ (LGBT) students in schools have been under-documented. For this reason, GLSEN conducted its first National School Climate Survey (NSCS) in 1999 to assess the experiences of LGBT students with regard to school-based harassment and victimization, the frequency with which they heard homophobic language in their schools and their overall comfort in school. Results from this first survey documented how homophobic language was pervasive in our nation's schools, that harassment was not an uncommon experience for LGBT students and that students were often uncomfortable in their schools because of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.²

In our 2001 national survey, we took a broader look at school climate. We asked students not only about experiences related to their sexual orientation but also experiences related to their race/ethnicity, gender, gender expression and disability. In addition, we asked students about school resources and supports regarding LGBT issues, such as LGBT topics included in classroom curricula and library resources, about the presence of supportive faculty or staff, and about their level of comfort discussing LGBT issues with school faculty and staff. The results from this 2001 National School Climate Survey echoed the findings from our 1999 survey—for many of our nation's LGBT students, school can be an unsafe and even dangerous place. The majority of the students in our 2001 survey reported being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation or their gender expression and a large number of students reported experiencing incidents of physical harassment, physical assault and sexual harassment. The findings from this survey also demonstrated that transgender students felt particularly vulnerable because of their gender expression. In 2003, we also asked those students who reported incidents of harassment or assault whether they reported these events to school personnel or to family members and whether family members ever intervened with the school. In order to understand how school-based resources and supports can improve the quality of school life for LGBT students, we asked students about the availability of resources and supports in their schools, such as having gay-straight alliances (GSAs), curricula that are inclusive of the lives of LGBT persons or a supportive teacher or school staff person. Findings from 2003 showed that not only do many LGBT students experience harassment and assault in school, most do not report the event to school personnel or their own families, potentially furthering their isolation. In 2003, we also documented how harassment can have a direct, negative bearing on a student's ability to learn, achieve and continue his or her education. Fortunately, we also found that institutional supports for LGBT students, such as school policies about harassment or supportive faculty/staff, can have a positive relationship to students' educational outcomes.

GLSEN's National School Climate Survey remains one of the few studies to examine the school experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual students nationally, and is the only one to include transgender stu-

dents. Since our 2003 report was released, there have been only two nationally representative studies that examined the experiences of lesbian, gay and other sexual minority students in school. These studies demonstrated that LGB youth commonly experienced in-school victimization based on their sexual orientation and that these experiences may have profound effects on their psychological well-being. Findings from a study utilizing data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) indicated that sexual minority youth (i.e., youth who reported same-sex attraction) had a lower sense of school belonging, lower self-esteem and were at greater risk of depression than their sexual majority (i.e., youth who were exclusively heterosexual) peers.³ Findings from another recent nationally representative study showed that LGB youth experiencing victimization in school had a greater likelihood of developing traumatic stress symptoms, such as anxiety and depression.⁴ In addition, youth who expressed their gender in an “atypical” manner (e.g., a male student acting too “feminine”) experienced higher frequencies of verbal harassment than those who had a traditional gender expression.

Several recent local studies provide further evidence of the relationship between LGB youths’ school experiences and psychological and school outcomes. Murdock and Bolch (2005), in a study of LGB youth in Missouri, found that LGB youth at schools with negative environments and who experienced harassment or assault had lower academic success than students who did not have these experiences.⁵ In addition, youth who had experienced a higher frequency of harassment/assault exhibited more disruptive behaviors (e.g., being sent to principal, suspension) than those who had not. A study utilizing Massachusetts and Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data found that LGB youth reporting frequent incidences of physical harassment or assault had a greater likelihood than non-LGB youth (who also reported high levels of victimization) to use drugs and alcohol, engage in risky sexual behaviors, and to have attempted suicide in the past year.⁶

Findings from recent regional studies also demonstrate that a positive school environment is related to positive psychological and school adjustment outcomes. A study of LGB youth in New England schools found that those reporting a positive school climate reported feeling more comfortable and less stigmatized at school and being more socially integrated with their non-LGB peers.⁷ Additional findings from Murdock and Bolch showed that LGB students who reported having supportive teachers were more likely to feel a sense of belonging at their school, indicating that the presence of supportive faculty may help to mitigate some of the negative outcomes associated with a hostile school climate.

Given the limited attention paid by federal, state and local policy makers to LGBT students, and because GLSEN’s work to make all schools safe for LGBT students is an on-going one, it is important for us to keep informed about the experiences of LGBT students in their

schools. For this reason, we have continued conducting our national biennial survey of LGBT secondary school students — the 2005 National School Climate Survey. As with previous surveys, we asked LGBT students about biased language in their schools, feelings of comfort and safety in school, experiences of verbal, physical and sexual harassment based on sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, race/ethnicity, disability and religion. We also asked those students who reported incidents of harassment or assault whether they reported these events to school personnel or to family members and whether family members ever intervened with the school. In the 2005 survey, we asked students who never reported harassment or assault their reasons for not reporting the events in order to understand how schools may be better able to assist these students. Also, we asked students who had reported victimization events to school personnel what the outcome was and how effective school personnel were in resolving the problems.

In order to understand how school-based resources and supports can improve the quality of school life for LGBT students, we asked students about resources and supports in their schools, such as having gay-straight alliances (GSAs), curricula that are inclusive of the lives of LGBT persons or a supportive teacher or counselor. As in the 2003 survey, we included questions about students' academic achievement and educational goals so that we could examine how school climate and resources may affect them. Lastly, in 2005, we examined how state-level education policies may affect school climate and achievement for LGBT students.

Notes

- 1 "Transgender" loosely refers to people who do not identify with the gender roles assigned to them by society based on their biological sex. Transgender is also used as an umbrella term for all those who do not conform to "traditional" notions of gender expression, including people who identify as transsexual, cross-dresser or drag king/queen.
- 2 "Gender identity" refers to a person's internal sense of being either male or female or something other than exclusively male or female. "Gender expression," on the other hand, refers to external characteristics and behaviors that are socially defined as masculine or feminine.
- 3 Galliher, R. V., Rostosky, S. S., & Hughes, H. K. (2004). School belonging, self-esteem, and depressive symptoms in adolescents: an examination of sex, sexual attraction status, and urbanicity. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 33, 235–245.
- 4 D'Augelli, A. R., Pilkington, N. W., & Hershberger, S. L. (2002). Incidence and mental health impact of sexual orientation victimization of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths in high school. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 17, 148–167.
- 5 Murdock, T. B., Bolch, M. B. (2005). Risk and protective factors for poor school adjustment in lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) high school youth: variable and person-centered analyses. *Psychology in the Schools*, 42, 159–172.
- 6 Bontempo, D.E., D'Augelli, A. R. (2002). Effects of at-school victimization and sexual orientation on lesbian, gay, or bisexual youths' health risk behavior. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 30, 364–374.
- 7 Elze, D. E. (2003). Gay, lesbian, and bisexual youths' perceptions of their high school environment and comfort in school. *Children and Schools*, 25, 225–239.

METHODOLOGY



In order to obtain a more representative sample of LGBT youth, we used two methods to locate possible participants. First, participants were obtained by contacting community-based groups or service organizations serving LGBT youth and invited to participate in the survey. Fifty groups/organizations were randomly selected from a list of over 300 and invited to participate. Out of these randomly selected groups, 39 were able to have youth complete the survey and a total of 381 surveys were obtained through this method. We also attempted to obtain an over-sample of LGBT youth from states in the South and Midwest, states which in the past have been underrepresented in our survey. Out of these 23 groups/organizations that were invited to participate in the survey, 14 were able to have youth complete it (for a total of 140 surveys). Thus, a total of 521 paper surveys were collected using this first method. Our second method was to make the National School Climate Survey available online through GLSEN's website. Notices about the survey were posted on LGBT-youth oriented listservs and websites. Notices were also emailed to GLSEN chapters and to youth advocacy organizations such as Advocates for Youth and Youth Guardian Services. To insure representation of transgender youth and youth of color, special efforts were made to notify groups and organizations that work predominately with these populations about the on-line survey. A total of 1,211 surveys were completed online. Data collection through community-based groups and service organizations occurred from April to July 2005. Data collection through the online version occurred from April to August 2005.

The sample consisted of a total of 1,732 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students between the ages of 13 and 20. Students were from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Excluded from the final total were youth who were not in a K-12 school during the 2004–2005 school year, youth who were not in school in the United States, and heterosexual youth (except for those who were also transgender). Table 1 presents the sample's demographics and Table 2 shows the characteristics of the schools attended. A majority of the sample (69.2%) was white, more than a quarter (28.9%) were youth of color, and a little more than half (52.2%) were female. About two-thirds of the sample (62.4%) identified as gay or lesbian and more than half (59.5%) were in the 11th or 12th grades.

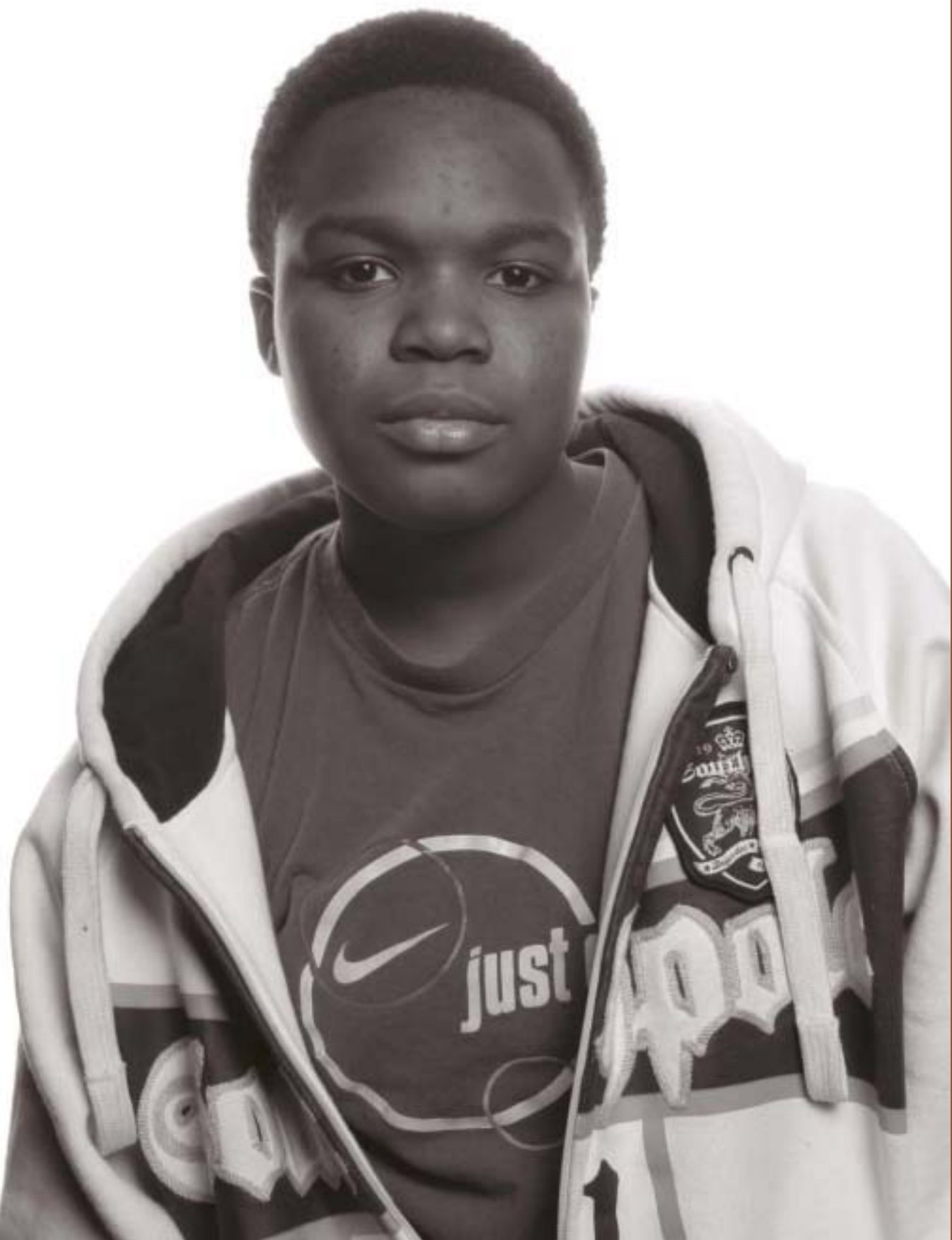
Table 1. Demographics of Survey Participants

Race and Ethnicity			Grade		
White	69.2%	(n=1186)	7th Grade	0.9%	(n=15)
African American/Black	6.5%	(n=112)	8th Grade	4.6%	(n=75)
Latino/a	10.0%	(n=172)	9th Grade	12.1%	(n=196)
Asian/Pacific Islander	5.1%	(n=87)	10th Grade	22.8%	(n=368)
Native American	3.9%	(n=67)	11th Grade	30.2%	(n=488)
Other Race/Ethnicity	1.9%	(n=33)	12th Grade	29.3%	(n=474)
Multiracial	3.4%	(n=58)			
Gender			Region		
Female	52.2%	(n=904)	Northeast (CT, DC, DE, ME, MD, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT)	28.5%	(n=486)
Male	38.1%	(n=660)	South (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV)	25.6%	(n=437)
Transgender	5.6%	(n=97)	Midwest (IL, IN, IA, KA, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, OK, SD, WI, WY)	23.8%	(n=406)
Other Gender Identities (e.g., “genderqueer,” “androgynous,” “bigendered”)	3.9%	(n=68)	West (AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NV, NM, OR, UT, WA)	22.0%	(n=375)
Sexual Orientation			Average Age = 16.3 years		
Gay or Lesbian	62.4%	(n=1080)			
Bisexual	27.2%	(n=470)			
Other Sexual Orientations (e.g., “queer,” “pansexual”)	10.5%	(n=181)			

Table 2. School Characteristics

Grade Levels		
K through 12 School	6.6%	(n=114)
Elementary School	0.2%	(n=4)
Lower School (elementary and middle school grades)	0.5%	(n=9)
Middle School	5.2%	(n=90)
Upper School (middle and high school grades)	6.6%	(n=114)
High School	80.7%	(n=1386)
Community Types		
Urban	27.8%	(n=467)
Suburban	54.8%	(n=920)
Small Town/Rural	17.4%	(n=292)
School Type		
Public School	88.6%	(n=1507)
Charter School	4.4% of public school students	(n=58)
Magnet School	10.5% of public school students	(n=148)
Religious-affiliated School	5.6%	(n=95)
Other Independent or Private School	5.8%	(n=99)

RESULTS

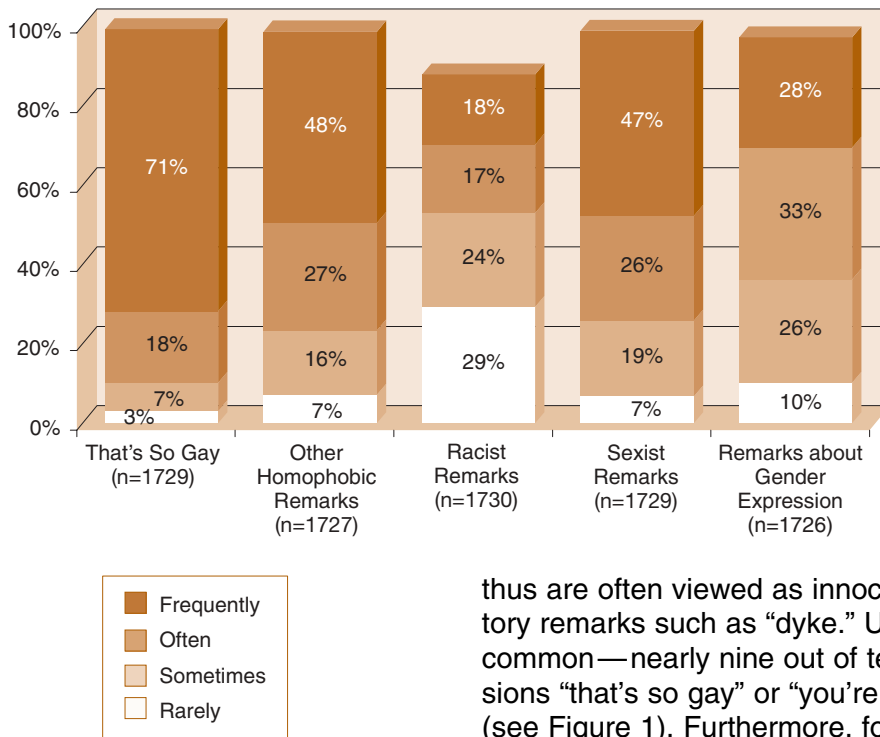




Biased Language in School

GLSEN strives to make schools safe for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, race or ethnicity or any other characteristic that may be the basis for harassment. Keeping classrooms and hallways free of homophobic, sexist and other types of biased language is one aspect of creating a safe school climate for students. The 2005 survey, like our previous surveys, asked students about the frequency of hearing homophobic remarks (such as “faggot,” “dyke” and “queer”), racist remarks (such as “nigger,” “spic” or “kike”) and sexist remarks (such as someone being called “bitch” in a derogatory way or talk about girls being inferior to boys) while at school. As in the 2003 survey, students were also asked about the frequency of hearing negative remarks about the way in which someone expressed their gender at school (such as a student being told that she does not act “feminine enough”). In addition to asking about the frequency of hearing remarks, students were also asked who the perpetrators were (students and/or faculty) and whether anyone intervened when hearing this type of language used in school.

Figure 1. Frequency of Hearing Biased Language in School



Homophobic Remarks

Respondents reported that homophobic remarks were the most common type of biased language heard in school. As shown in Figure 1, three-quarters (75.4%) of students reported hearing derogatory remarks, such as “dyke” or “faggot,” often or frequently in school. As in the 2001 and 2003 surveys, we also asked students about the frequency of hearing the expressions “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay” in school. These expressions are often used to mean that something or someone is stupid or worthless and

thus are often viewed as innocuous in comparison to overtly derogatory remarks such as “dyke.” Use of these expressions was very common—nearly nine out of ten (89.2%) students heard the expressions “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay” often or frequently at school (see Figure 1). Furthermore, for many LGBT students hearing “gay” or “queer” used in a derogatory manner at school troubled them. About two-thirds (67.1%) reported that this caused them to feel bothered or distressed to some degree (see Figure 2).

Students were also asked about the frequency of hearing biased remarks from students and from school staff:

- Nearly eight out of ten (78.8%) students reported hearing homophobic remarks from other students often or frequently (see Figure 3).

Figure 2. Degree that Students Were Bothered or Distressed as a Result of Hearing Words Like “Gay” or “Queer” Used in a Derogatory Way (n=1715)

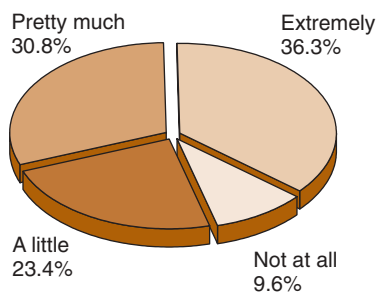
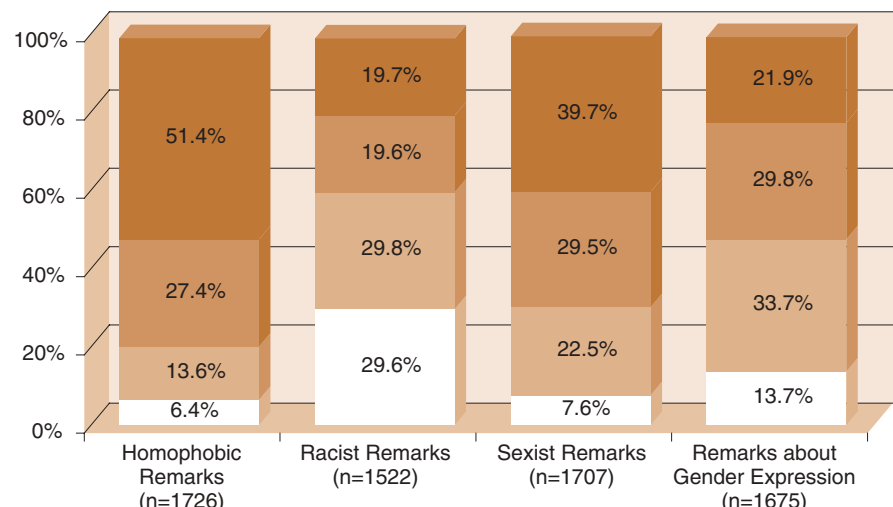


Figure 3. Frequency of Hearing Biased Language from Students



- Almost half (43.5%) of the students reported that most of their peers made these types of remarks (see Figure 4).
- Nearly a fifth of students heard homophobic remarks from their teachers or other school staff—18.6% reported hearing remarks at least sometimes from school personnel (see Figure 5).

Sexist Remarks

Sexist remarks, such as calling someone a “bitch” in a derogatory manner, comments about girls being inferior to boys or comments about girls’ bodies, were also commonly heard in school. Similar to homophobic remarks, about three-quarters (73.1%) of the students heard sexist remarks often or frequently in school (see Figure 1). In addition, nearly seven out of ten (69.2%) said they heard sexist remarks from other students frequently or often and four out of ten (40.1%) said they heard such comments from most of their peers (see Figures 3 and 4). Many students (28.3%) also reported that school personnel made sexist remarks at least sometimes while in school (see Figure 5).

Racist Remarks

Hearing racist remarks such as “spic” or “nigger” in school was not uncommon. As Figure 1 illustrates, a little more than a third (35.0%) reported hearing racist remarks often or frequently in school. About four out of ten (39.3%) students heard racist remarks specifically from their peers and nearly a fifth (17.6%) reported that most of the students at their school made these types of remarks (see Figures 3 and 4). About a tenth (9.5%) of students reported hearing racist remarks from faculty of other school personnel at least sometimes.

Figure 4. Number of Students Making Biased Remarks

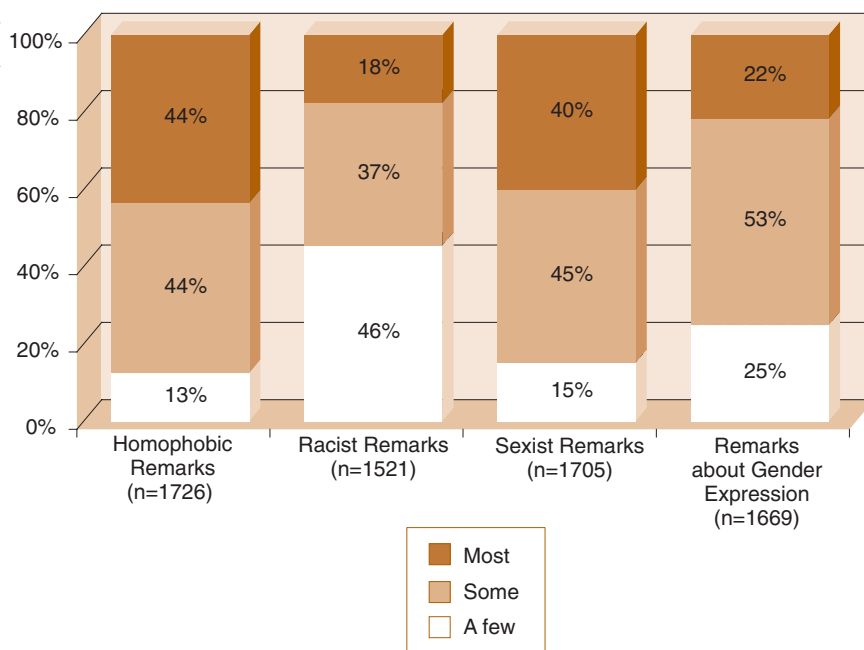
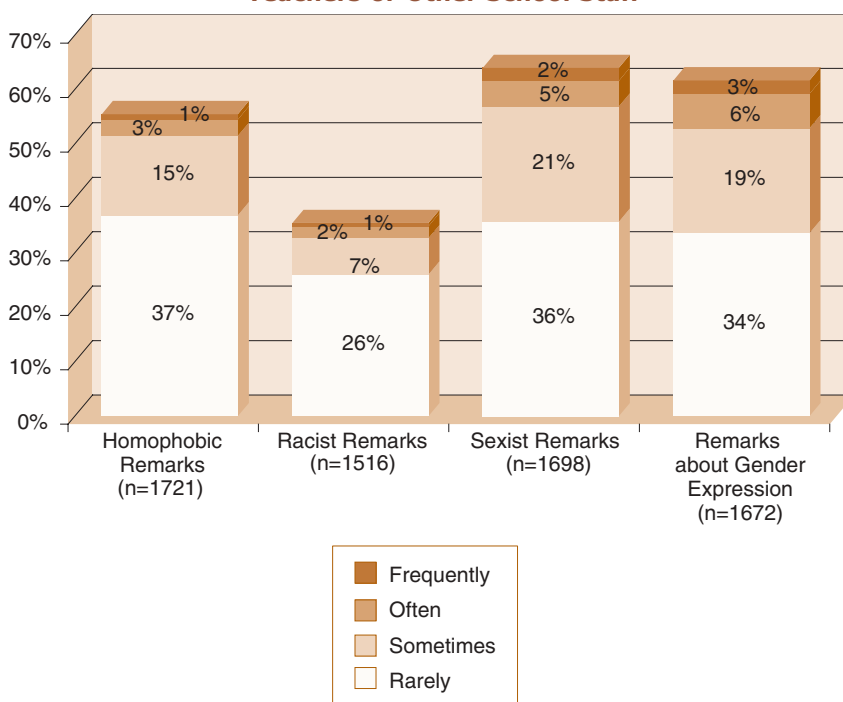


Figure 5. Frequency of Hearing Biased Language from Teachers or Other School Staff



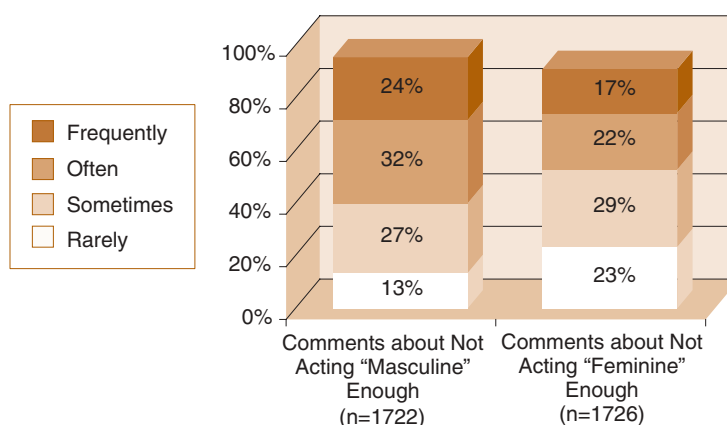
Negative Remarks about Gender Expression

We first asked about the frequency of hearing negative comments about gender expression (such as a student being told that they do not act “feminine enough” or “masculine enough”) in the 2003 survey. Our society upholds strict norms for what is considered an appropriate expression of one’s gender. Those who express themselves in a manner considered to be atypical often experience harsh criticism, harassment, and sometimes even violence. While homophobia and bias about how gender should be expressed may often be related, comments about someone’s gender expression may be directed at persons who may or may not identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual. Thus, for some LGBT students, their experiences at school may be affected by these types of remarks.

Findings from this survey demonstrate that negative remarks about the way in which someone expressed their gender were pervasive. We asked students two separate questions about hearing comments related to a student’s gender expression: one question asked how often they heard remarks about someone not acting “masculine enough,” and another question about how often they heard comments about someone not acting “feminine enough.” Students more frequently reported hearing remarks about someone’s perceived lack of masculinity than about someone’s perceived lack of femininity:

- Over half (55.5%) had often or frequently heard comments about students not acting “masculine enough.” In contrast, 38.3% heard comments as frequently about students not acting “feminine enough” (see Figure 6).
- Similar to sexist remarks, over a quarter (28.1%) of students heard teachers or other staff make negative comments about a student’s gender expression at least sometimes (see Figure 5).

Figure 6. Frequency of Hearing Remarks About Students’ Gender Expression



Biased Language and Intervention by School Staff and Students

In addition to the frequency of hearing biased language in school, students were asked how often their teachers or other school staff intervened when such remarks were made in their presence.

Students in our survey reported that their peers were less likely to make racist remarks or negative remarks about someone's gender expression when school personnel were present than they were to make homophobic or sexist remarks. As shown in Figure 7, more students said that school staff were present all or most of the time when homophobic or sexist remarks were made (42.2% and 30.2%, respectively) than when racist remarks or remarks about someone's gender expression were made (24.3% and 24.8%, respectively).

Even when faculty or other school staff were present, the use of biased and derogatory language by students remained largely unchallenged. As shown in Figure 8, less than a fifth of the students reported that school personnel most often intervened ("most of the time" or "always") when homophobic remarks and negative remarks about gender expression were made in their presence (16.5% and 15.3%, respectively). School staff were much more likely to intervene when students used sexist and racist language—39.3% said that staff most often intervened when hearing sexist language and 59.6% intervened as often when hearing racist remarks. Although school staff were no more likely to be present when students used racist language than when negative remarks about gender expression were made, they were more likely to intervene when hearing racist remarks.

Infrequent intervention by school authorities when hearing biased language in school may send a message to students that such language is tolerated. Although the use of biased language by teachers and other school staff was not as commonplace as its use by students, hearing homophobic, sexist or other types of biased remarks from school personnel can send a message to students that it is not only tolerated but also acceptable. The fact that so many students reported biased remarks being made in the presence of school personnel seems to support this point. For example, it could be that students were less likely to be challenged or reprimanded

Figure 7. Presence of Teachers or Other School Staff when Biased Remarks Were Made

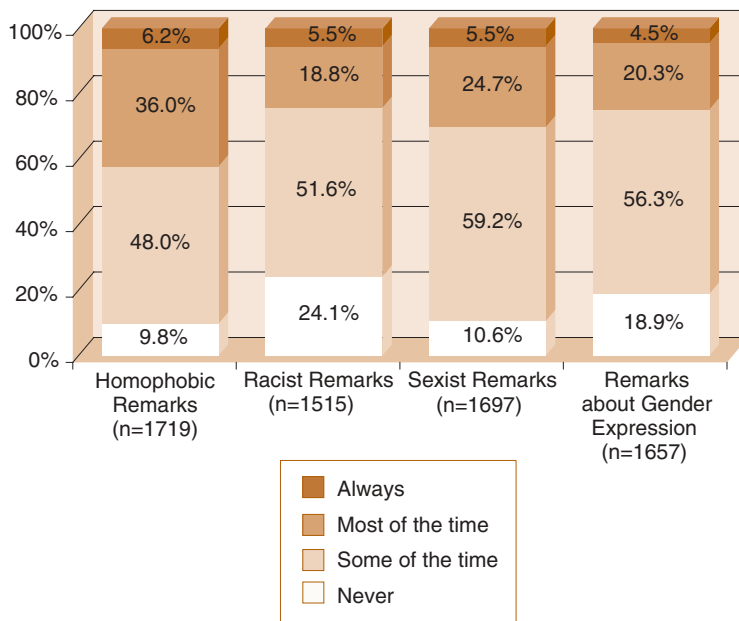


Figure 8. Frequency of Intervention by Teachers or Other School Staff when Biased Remarks Were Made

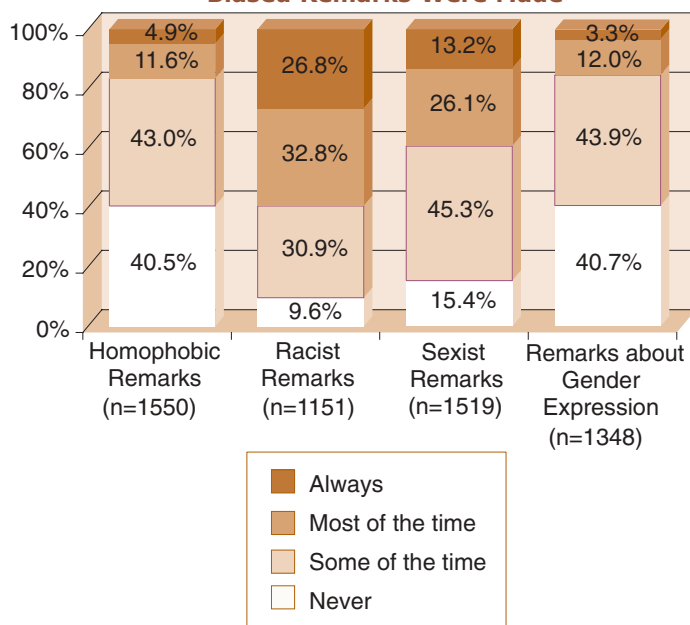
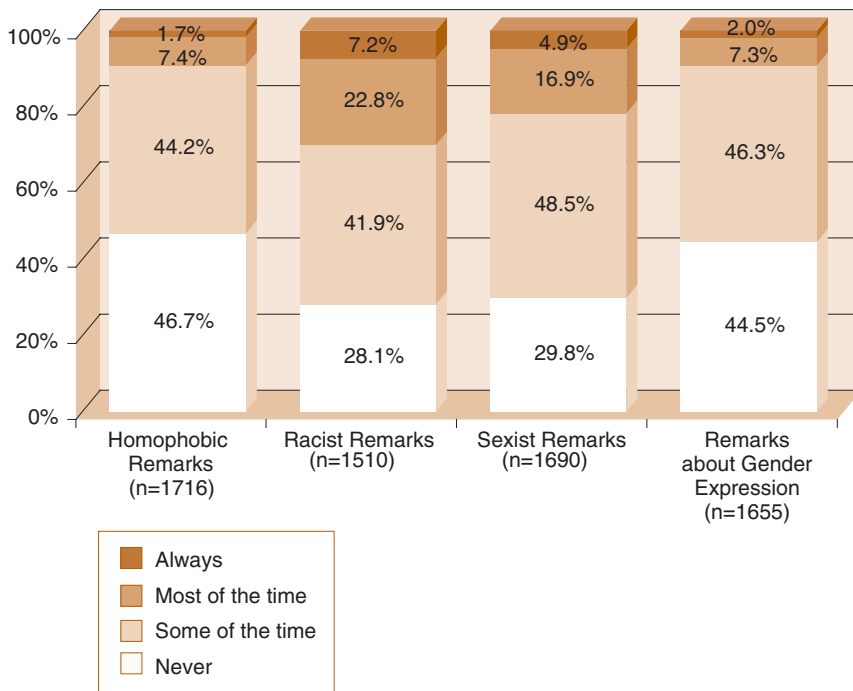


Figure 9. Frequency of Intervention by Students when Biased Remarks Were Made



when making homophobic remarks than when making overtly racist remarks, and thus, may have felt more comfortable doing so when school staff were around.

Although one would expect teachers and school staff to bear the responsibility for addressing problems of biased language in school, students intervening amongst themselves is another indicator of school climate. As shown in Figure 9, few students reported that their peers frequently intervened when hearing homophobic remarks (9.1%) or comments about someone's gender expression (9.3%). Although intervention by students when hearing racist or sexist remarks was not common, similar to school staff, students were more likely to intervene when hearing these types of remarks (see Figure 9).

Comparison of Biased Language Use in School among GLSEN's 2001, 2003 and 2005 Surveys

Comments like "that's so gay" were the most commonly heard of all types of remarks across all three years and has not varied in its high frequency since 2001 (see Table 3). With regard to sexist and homophobic remarks, there was a small decrease in frequency from 2001 to 2003 but no difference from 2003 to 2005. Racist remarks were the least frequent across all three time points. In 2003, there was a

Table 3. Average Frequency of Hearing Biased Remarks in School by Year^a

	2001	2003	2005
"That's so gay" ^b	4.61	4.58	4.56
Other Homophobic Remarks ^c	4.37	4.16	4.14
Racist Remarks ^d	3.04	2.81	2.99
Sexist Remarks ^c	4.31	4.15	4.11
Remarks About Not Being Masculine Enough ^{b,e}	—	3.58	3.57
Remarks About Not Being Feminine Enough ^{b,e}	—	3.12	3.14

^a Questions about frequency used a five-point scale: 1 "Never" 2 "Rarely" 3 "Sometimes" 4 "Often" and 5 "Frequently" (e.g., a mean score between 4 and 5 has a value between "Often" and "Frequently").

^b No groups significantly different.

^c 2001 was significantly higher than 2003 and 2005.

^d 2003 lower than 2001 and 2005.

^e Question not asked in 2001.

small but significant drop in frequency from 2001. However, in 2005, the frequency of hearing racist remarks was not different from the findings in 2001.⁸ There were no differences across years in the frequency with which faculty or school staff intervened when hearing any of these types of biased remarks.

As shown in Table 4, there were small but significant decreases in the frequency with which students reported hearing teachers or school staff making biased remarks between 2001 and other years.⁹ Although the frequency of any type of biased remarks from school personnel was low, the frequency of faculty or staff making sexist remarks was higher than other types of remarks across all three years.

Notes

- 8 To test differences across years, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with four biased language dependent variables. The multivariate results were significant – Pillai's Trace=.02; $F(8,6986)=8.62$, $p<.001$. Resulting univariate analyses were considered significant at a 95% significance level.
- 9 To test differences across years, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with three biased language dependent variables. The multivariate results were significant – Pillai's Trace=.01; $F(6,6014)=4.34$, $p<.001$. Resulting univariate analyses were considered significant at a 95% significance level.

Table 4. Average Frequency of Biased Remarks Made by Teachers in School by Year^a

	2001	2003	2005
Homophobic Remarks ^b	1.93	1.82	1.79
Racist Remarks ^b	1.57	1.46	1.49
Sexist Remarks ^b	2.21	2.08	2.02
Remarks About Gender Expression ^{c,d}	—	2.02	2.01

^a Questions about frequency used a five-point scale: 1 "Never" 2 "Rarely" 3 "Sometimes" 4 "Often" and 5 "Frequently" (e.g., a mean score between 2 and 3 has a value between "Rarely" and "Sometimes").

^b 2001 was significantly higher than other years.

^c Question not asked in 2001.

^d No significant differences.



Overall Safety in School

Although LGBT students may feel unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation and/or their gender identity or expression, they may also feel unsafe because of other personal characteristics, such as their race or ethnicity, or a disability. Thus, to assess overall feelings of safety in school, students were asked if they felt unsafe due to their sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, race or ethnicity, because of a real or perceived disability, or because of their actual or presumed religion. Three-quarters (74.2%) of the students reported feeling unsafe because of at least one of these personal characteristics.

- Nearly two-thirds of students (64.3%) reported that they felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation (see Figure 10).
- More than a third of students (40.7%) reported feeling unsafe in school because of how they express their gender (e.g., a male student who does not act traditionally “masculine”).
- Nearly a fifth (17.0%) of students also felt unsafe because of their religion (or the religion that others thought they were).
- Additionally, some students felt unsafe because of their gender (10.3%), race or ethnicity (7.7%), or because of a real or perceived disability (5.5%).

For all students, feeling unsafe or uncomfortable in school may negatively affect their academic success, particularly if it results in avoiding classes or missing entire days of school. We asked students how many times they had missed class or an entire day of school in the

past month because they felt uncomfortable or unsafe in school. As shown in Figures 11 and 12, 28.8% of students reported skipping a class at least once in the past month and 28.9% of students had missed at least one day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable in school or on their way to or from school.

Figure 10. Percentage of Students Who Felt Unsafe at School

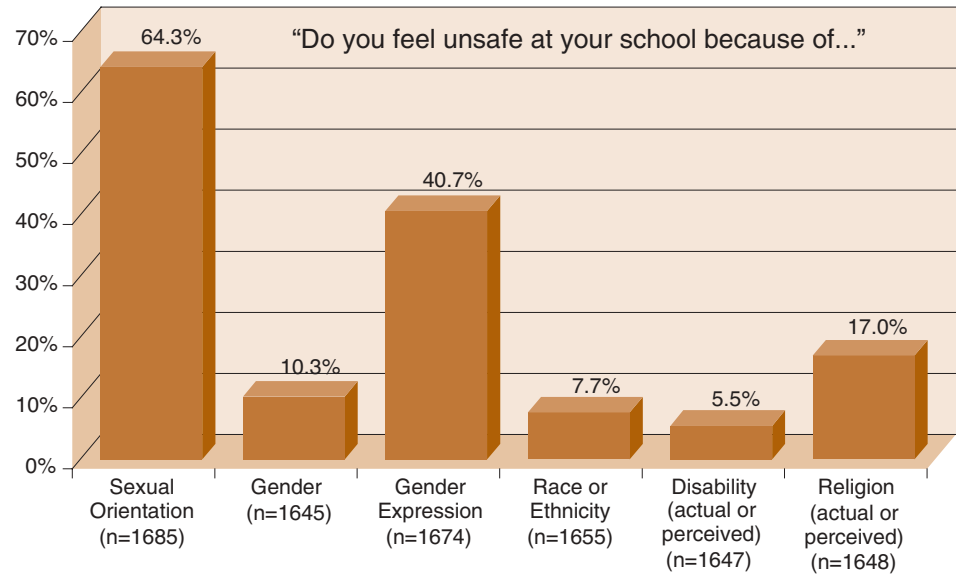


Figure 11. Frequency of Missing Classes in the Past Month Because of Feeling Unsafe
(n=1724)

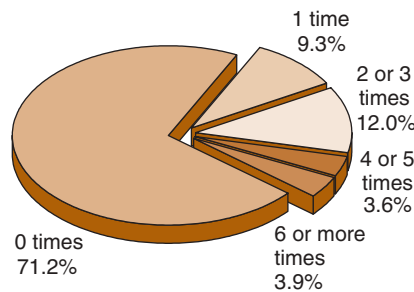
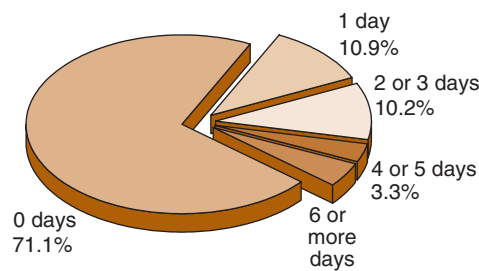


Figure 12. Frequency of Missing Days of School in the Past Month Because of Feeling Unsafe
(n=1723)





Experiences of Harassment and Assault in School

Given that the majority of LGBT students in our national survey feel unsafe in school, it is important to document their experiences related to in-school harassment and violence. Thus, we asked the students in our survey how frequently in the past school year they had been verbally or physically harassed or physically assaulted. Additionally, students were asked whether they believed these events were related to their sexual orientation, their gender, how they express their gender, their race or ethnicity, their actual or perceived disability and/or their actual or perceived religion. Students were asked whether such incidents happened “frequently,” “often,” “sometimes,” “rarely” or “never.”

Verbal Harassment

The vast majority of LGBT students reported some experience of verbal harassment (e.g., being called names or threatened) in the past year, most commonly related to their sexual orientation or gender expression. As shown in Figure 13, nearly two-thirds (64.1%) of respondents reported having been harassed at least some of the time in the past year because of their sexual orientation, with over a third (38.4%) saying that such harassment happened frequently or often. With regard to gender expression, nearly half (45.5%) reported verbal harassment at least some of the time and more than a quarter (27.0%) reported that it occurred more frequently. In addition, about a tenth of students had reported being verbally harassed frequently or often in their school because of their religion (11.4%) or because of their gender (9.0%).

Figure 13. Frequency of Verbal Harassment in the Past School Year

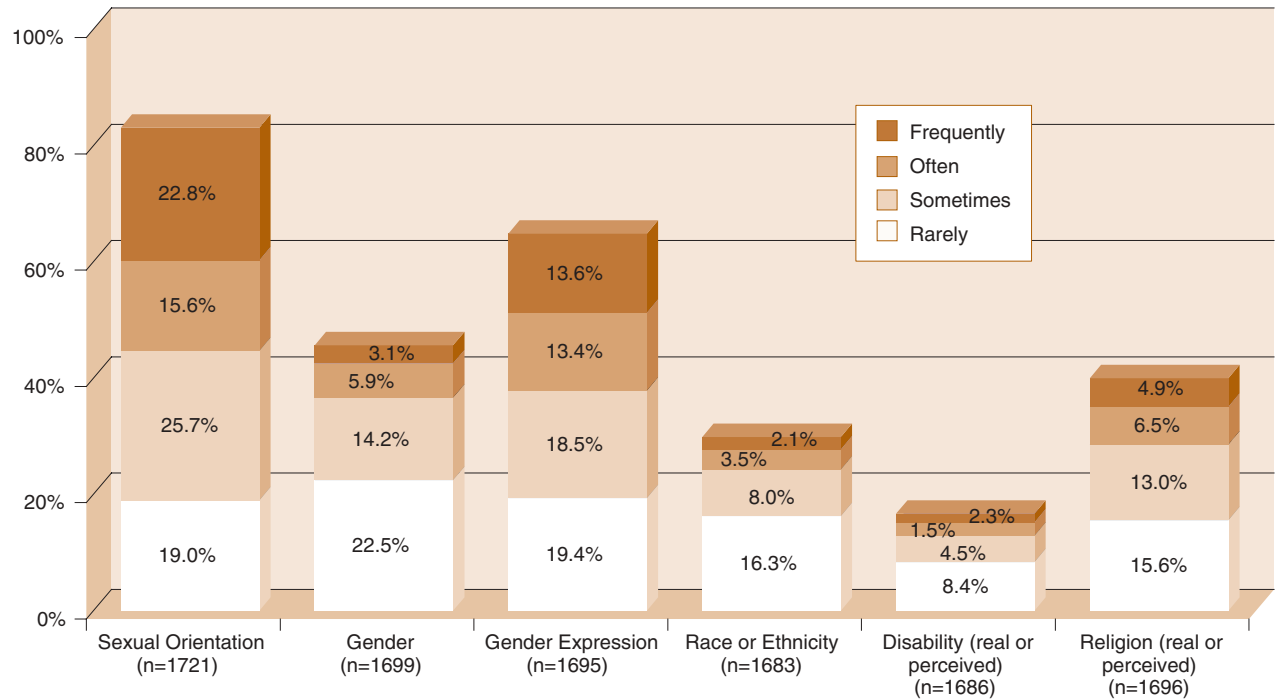


Figure 14. Frequency of Physical Harassment in the Past School Year

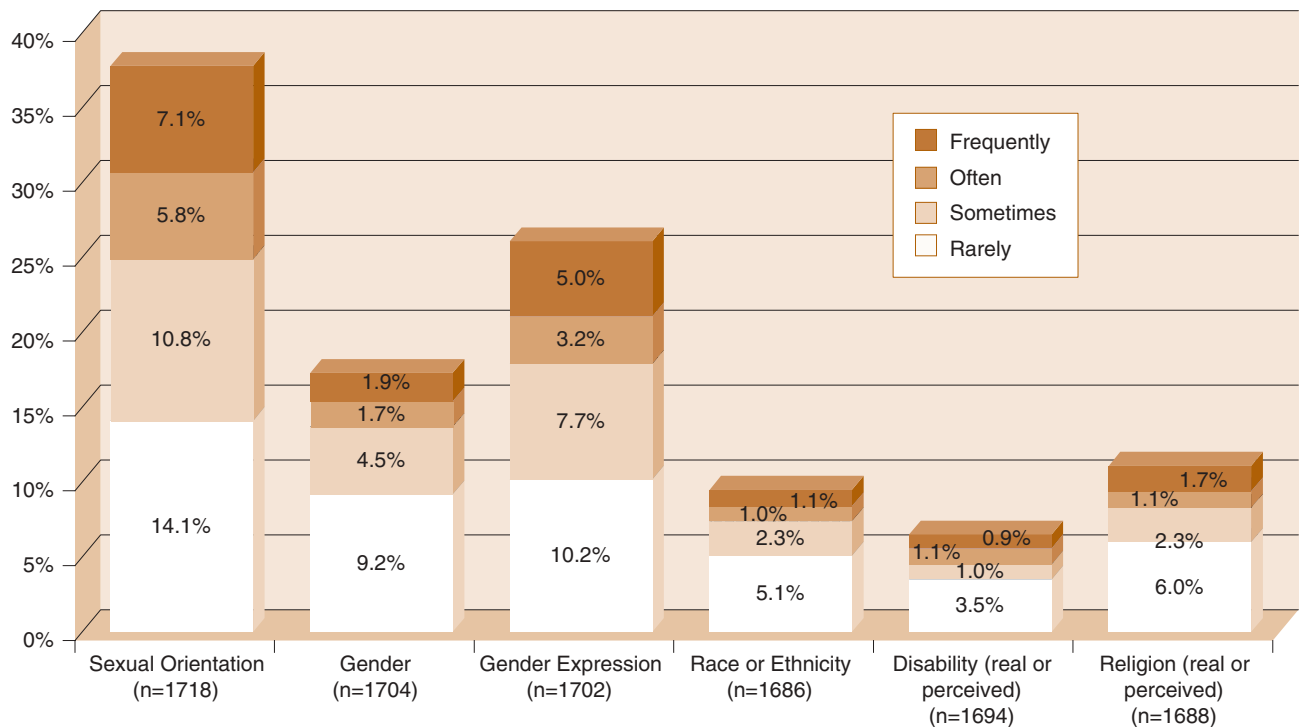


Figure 15. Frequency of Physical Assault in the Past School Year

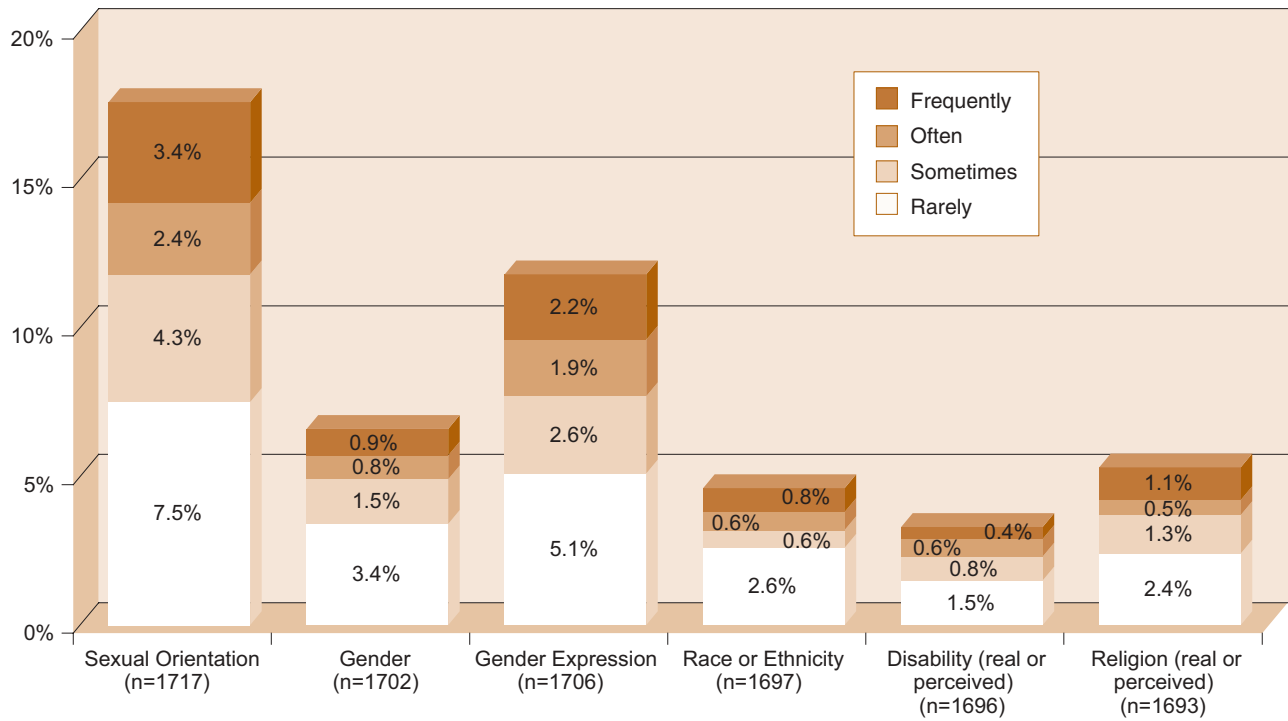
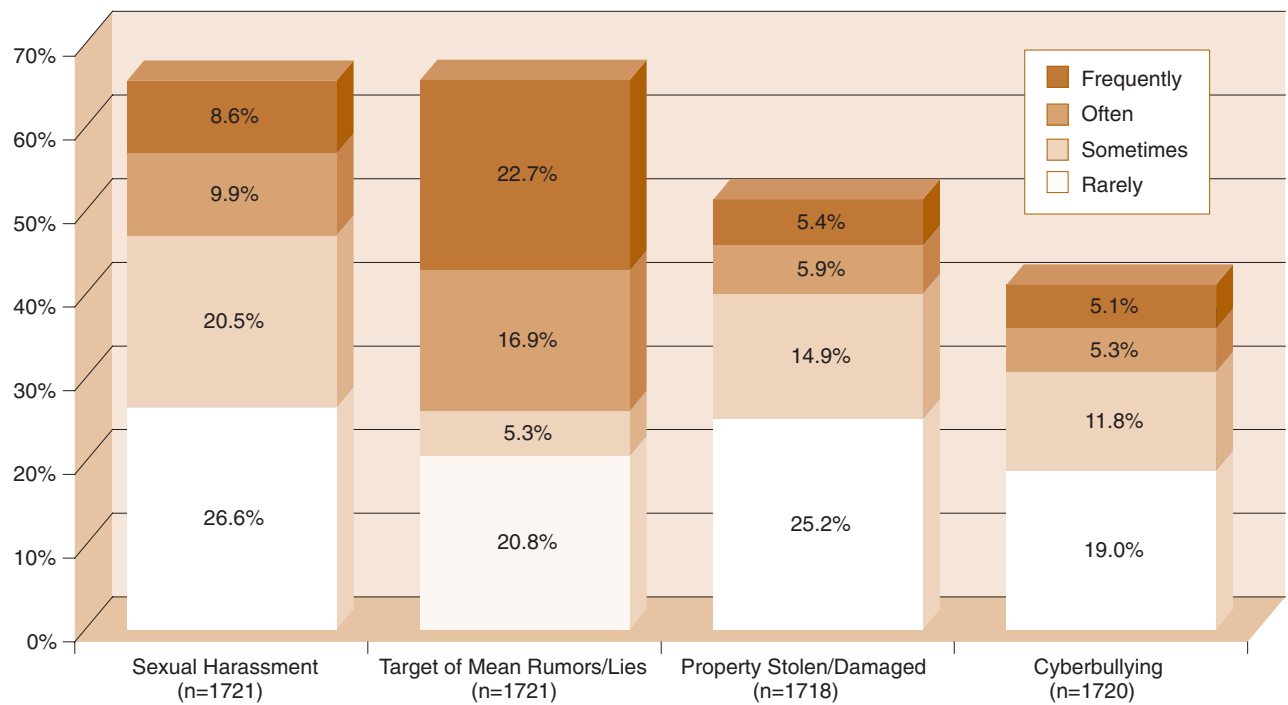


Figure 16. Frequency of Other Types of Harassment in the Past School Year



Physical Harassment

As illustrated in Figure 14, over a third of LGBT students reported at least some experience of physical harassment (e.g., being pushed, shoved, etc.) because of their sexual orientation (37.8%), with over 10% reporting that it occurred frequently or often.¹⁰ In addition, a quarter of students (26.1%) had been physically harassed because of their gender expression (i.e., they did not act traditionally “feminine” or “masculine” enough). Nearly a fifth (17.3%) of students also reported this type of harassment because of their gender.

Physical Assault

Students were also asked whether they had been physically assaulted (e.g., punched, kicked or injured with a weapon) while in school. As shown in Figure 15, the incidence of physical assault was relatively low, perhaps given the extreme nature of the behavior. Nevertheless, nearly a fifth (17.6%) of the LGBT students in the survey reported that they had been assaulted in the past year due to their sexual orientation and more than a tenth (11.8%) had been assaulted because of the way in which they expressed their gender.

Other Types of Harassment in School

In addition to being harassed or assaulted because of specific personal characteristics, students may experience victimization events that are not clearly related to a personal characteristic. Thus, we asked respondents about other types of harassment they may have experienced at school, such as being sexually harassed or having their property deliberately damaged or receiving threatening emails (see Figure 16).

Sexual Harassment. A 2001 report from the Human Rights Watch on LGBT youth found that the harassment experienced by LGBT students in school is often sexual in nature, particularly experienced by lesbian and bisexual young women and by transgender youth.¹¹ In our 2005 NSCS, students were asked how often they had been sexually harassed in school, such as sexual remarks being made about them or being touched inappropriately. About two-thirds of LGBT students had been sexually harassed in the past school year.

Relational Aggression. Although research on bullying and harassment often focuses on physical or overt acts of aggressive behavior, it is also important to consider relational forms of aggression—harm caused by damage to peer relationships. One common form of this type of aggression is spreading rumors or gossip about a peer. Students in the 2005 survey were asked how often someone had spread mean rumors or lies about them in the past school year. As shown in Figure 16, nearly two-thirds of students encountered this form of aggression in the past year. Furthermore, over a third of students reported that this had happened frequently or often.

Property Damaged or Stolen in School. Having one's personal property damaged or stolen is yet another dimension of a hostile school climate. In the present survey, we asked students how often they had had their property, such as their car, clothing or books, stolen or deliberately damaged at school. Half of the students (51.4%) had their property deliberately damaged or stolen in the past year with about a tenth (11.3%) reporting that it happened frequently or often.

Cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is using an electronic medium, such as e-mails or text messages, to threaten or harm others. Many experts believe that this electronic form of peer harassment is becoming increasingly prevalent. Although there is little information about how prevalent cyberbullying is in the United States, a recent British survey found that one-fifth of young people (ages 11 to 19) reported having experienced some sort of electronic bullying or threat.¹² For these reasons, students in the 2005 NSCS were asked how frequently they received harassing or threatening emails, instant messages or text messages from students in their school. Four out of ten (41.2%) LGBT students reported that they had experienced this type of harassment in the past school year—more than double the percentage of students in the British survey.

Relationship Between Experiences of Harassment and Assault and Missing Classes or Days of School

Students experiencing frequent harassment or assault in school may attempt to avoid these hurtful experiences by missing the classes where they are often victimized or by ceasing to attend school altogether. Therefore, school-based harassment may actually impinge on a student's right to an education. In our 2005 survey, we found that experiences with verbal harassment, physical harassment and physical assault were, in fact, related to missing classes or days of school:

- Students who had been verbally harassed or physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation were almost three times more likely to report missing at least one day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe (see Figure 17). Those who had been physically harassed because of their sexual orientation were more than three times as likely to have missed at least one school day in the past month (49.8% versus 16.3%).
- As shown in Figure 18, students who had been verbally harassed because of their gender expression were almost twice as likely to have missed at least one day of school (34.9% versus 17.8%). Those who had been physically harassed or assaulted based on their gender expression were almost three times more likely to have missed at least one day of school.

Figure 17. Students' Experiences with Harassment and Assault Based on Sexual Orientation and Missing School

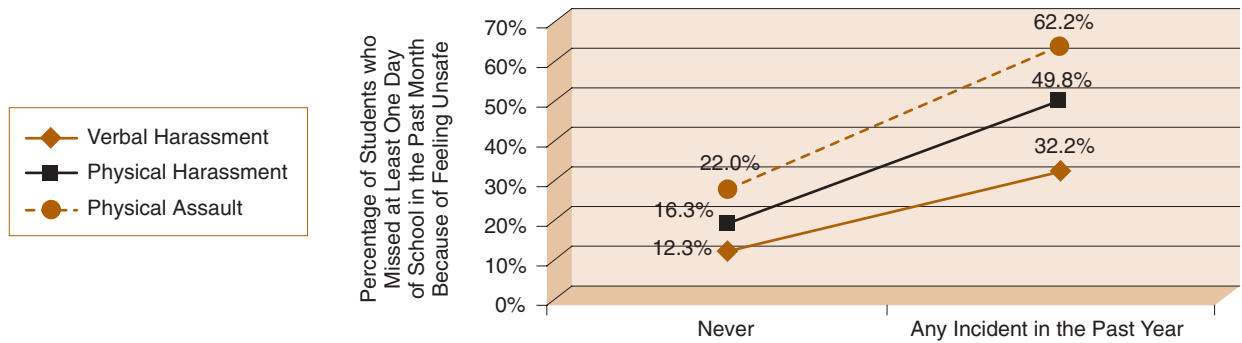
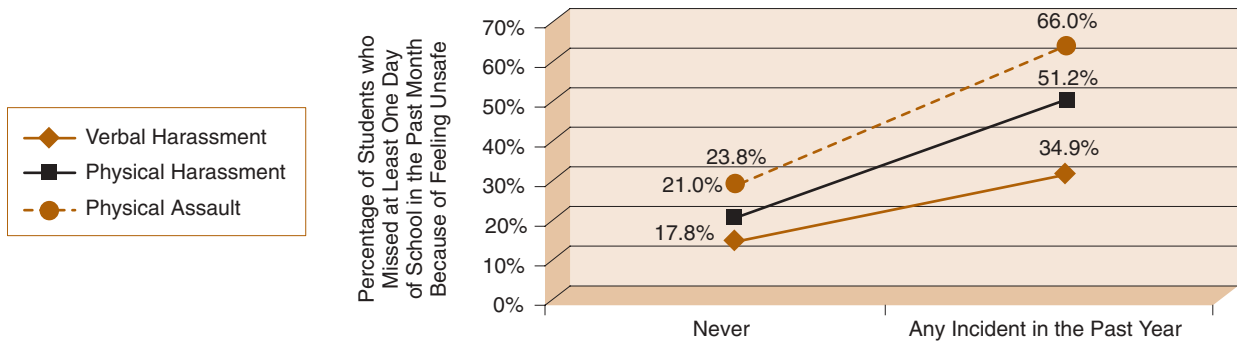


Figure 18. Students' Experiences with Harassment and Assault Based on Gender Expression and Missing School



Comparisons with Population Based Studies

Given that the National School Climate Survey is focused solely on the experiences of LGBT students, it does not provide any relative comparison with the experiences of non-LGBT students nationally. The GLSEN and Harris Interactive report "From Teasing to Torment," because it was a population-based survey, had a small sample of students who identified as LGBT. In that report, we found that LGBT students were three times as likely as non-LGBT students to feel not safe at school (22% vs. 7%), and 90% of LGBT teens (vs. 62% of non-LGBT teens) had been verbally or physically harassed or assaulted during the past year because of their appearance, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, race/ethnicity, disability or religion. These comparisons, while valid, are limited because of the small percentage of LGBT students in the sample. Thus, we compared some of the findings of GLSEN's 2005 NSCS with the national sample of "From Teasing to Torment" to examine further the degree of school-based harassment for LGBT students relative to their peers.

With regard to biased language in schools, there were interesting similarities and differences between the LGBT students and the general population. As shown in Table 5, LGBT students reported hearing homophobic, racist and sexist remarks more often in their schools

than the general population of students. However, both groups reported higher percentages of hearing homophobic and sexist remarks than hearing racist remarks.

As was found in the general population survey, LGBT students in the 2005 NSCS were much more likely to feel unsafe in their schools for any reason. Whereas less than a quarter (22%) of students in the GLSEN/Harris Interactive study reported feeling unsafe, nearly three-quarters of LGBT students (74.2%) in the 2005 NSCS felt unsafe for any reason. LGBT students were also much more likely to report missing classes or entire days of school because they felt unsafe in school compared to the general population sample. For example, as shown in Figure 19, LGBT students were five times more likely than the general population students to report having missed at least one day of school in the past month because of feeling unsafe (28.8% vs. 4.5%).

Results from the GLSEN/Harris general population survey also provided confirmation that school can be a hostile environment for many LGBT students. Students in the GLSEN/Harris survey were asked how often students were harassed, bullied or called names in school because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation and because of how they express their gender. As shown in Figure 20, nearly two-thirds of students from the general population of secondary school students reported that other students in their school are harassed because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, which is quite similar to the percentage of LGBT students in our 2005 survey who reported being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation. With regard to gender expression, the percentage of general population students who reported others being harassed for this reason was somewhat lower than the percentage of LGBT students who reported actual harassment (45.5% vs. 60.0%).

Table 5. Comparison Between LGBT Students and a National Sample of Secondary School Students on Biased Language in School

		LGBT Secondary School Students— NSCS 2005	National Sample of Secondary School Students (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2005)
Biased Language from Students (at least some of the time)	Homophobic Remarks	92.5%	76.1%
	Racist Remarks	69.2%	49.6%
	Sexist Remarks	91.7%	78.2%
Teachers Intervening When Hearing Students Make Biased Comments (percent not reporting “Never”)	Homophobic Remarks	59.5%	84.3%
	Racist Remarks	90.4%	87.2%
	Sexist Remarks	84.6%	89.8%
Biased Language from Teachers (at least some of the time)	Homophobic Remarks	18.7%	6.9%
	Racist Remarks	9.5%	5.2%
	Sexist Remarks	28.3%	8.8%

Figure 19. Comparison of NSCS 2005 Sample of LGBT Students with a National Sample of Secondary School Students: Missing School or Classes Because of Feeling Unsafe

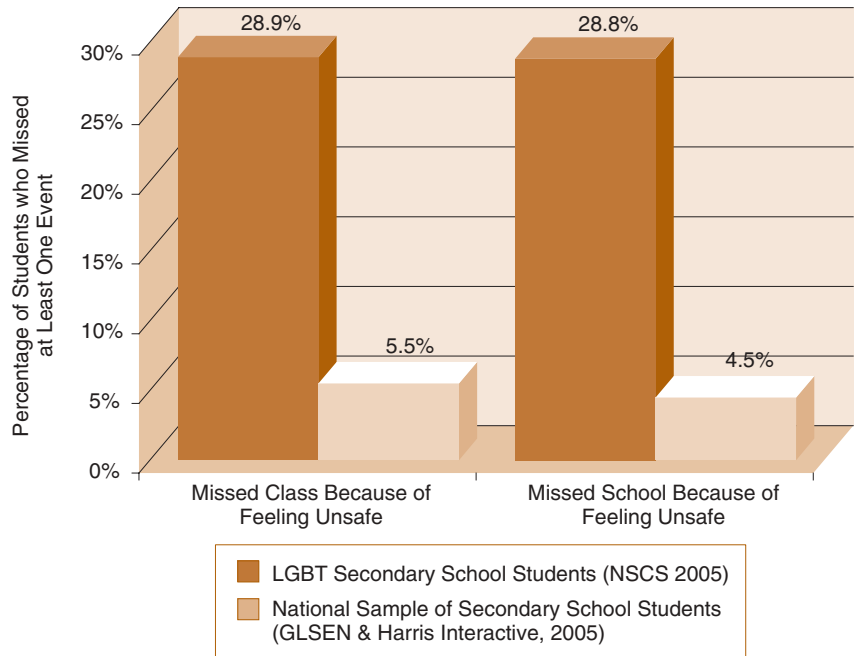
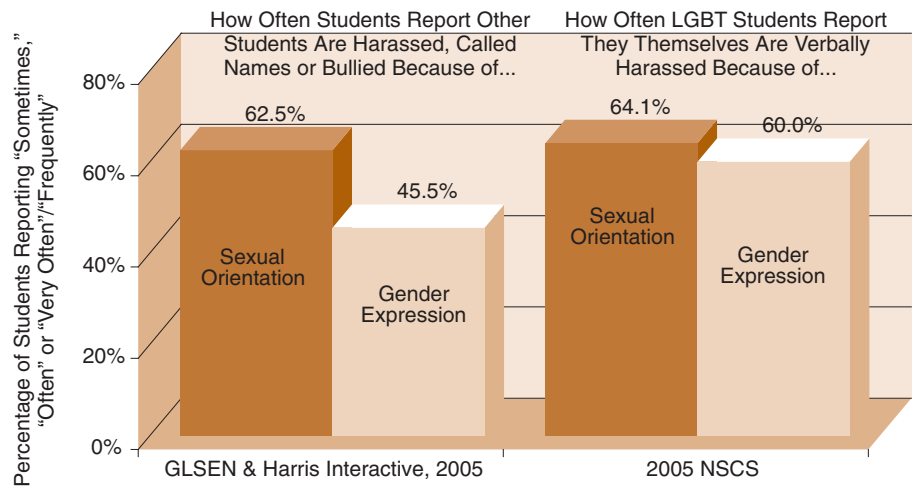


Figure 20. Comparison of LGBT Students' Reports of Verbal Harassment Based on Sexual Orientation and General High School Population Reports of How Often Students Are Harassed in Their School Because of Their Actual or Perceived Sexual Orientation



Comparison Among GLSEN's 2001, 2003 and 2005 Surveys

The ultimate outcome of GLSEN's work is for our nation's schools to provide accepting and safer environments so that all students can learn. Since our 2003 survey, there have been positive changes that could improve school climate for LGBT students: Maine has added statewide protection against anti-LGBT behaviors in schools, bringing the total number of states with such legislation up to nine, plus the District of Columbia, and the number of GSAs or other types of clubs that address LGBT student issues has continued to increase nationally. As more school districts develop and implement inclusionary protective policies and teacher training programs, we would hope to see a decrease in the incidence of biased language and in the reports of harassment and victimization taking place in our schools. However, other changes may promote a more hostile climate for LGBT students: restrictions on curricular discussions of homosexuality, as well as school and school-district battles over efforts to eliminate or restrict student access to GSAs. To gain some understanding of whether there has been improvement in school climate for LGBT students in middle and high schools, we examined the incidence of reported harassment and assault, and feelings of safety in school from 2001 to 2005.

In 2003, we found only a few small but significant changes with regard to school safety and experiences of harassment and assault. Overall, we found few differences from 2003 to present. Figure 21 shows the percentages of students who felt unsafe in their school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression from 2001 to 2005. Although the percentage of students who felt unsafe in school for these reasons decreased from 2001 to 2003, they remained unchanged between 2003 and 2005.¹³

We also examined whether the levels of harassment and assault related to sexual orientation varied across years (see Figure 22):¹⁴

- There were no differences among the three survey years in students' reports of verbal harassment.
- Rates of physical harassment in 2003 and 2005 were significantly lower than in 2001, but there were no changes from 2003 to present.
- There was a small but significant decrease in rates of physical assault from 2001 to 2003 and no differences between 2003 and 2005.

These small gains with regard to sexual orientation were not evident in the incidence of harassment and assault related to gender expression. As shown in Figure 23, there were no significant changes from 2001 to the present.

Figure 21. Percentage of Students Feeling Unsafe Because of Their Sexual Orientation or Gender Expression by Year

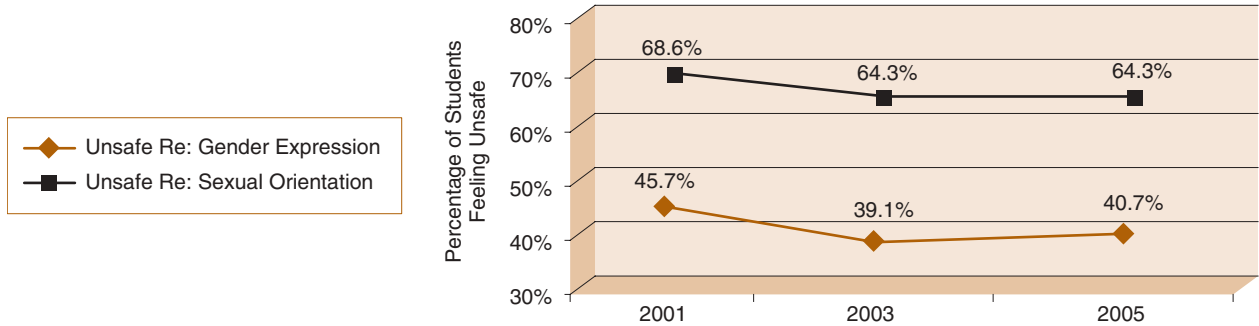


Figure 22. Harassment and Assault Based on Sexual Orientation by Year

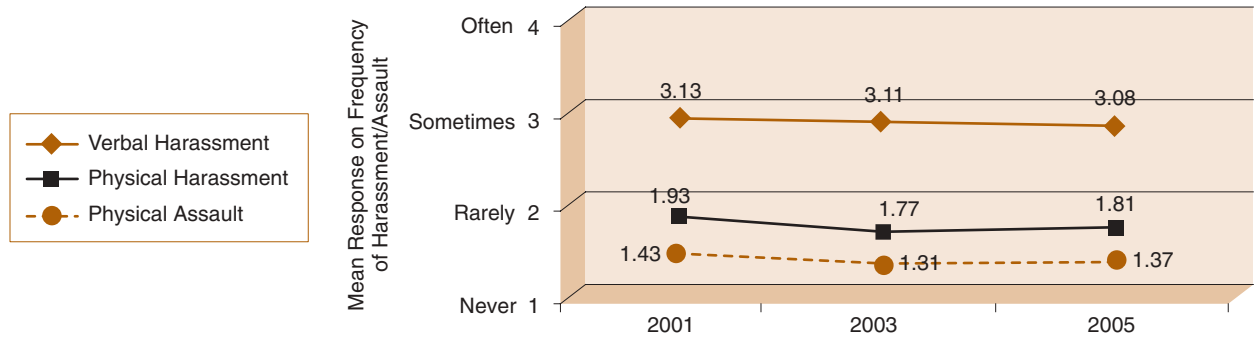
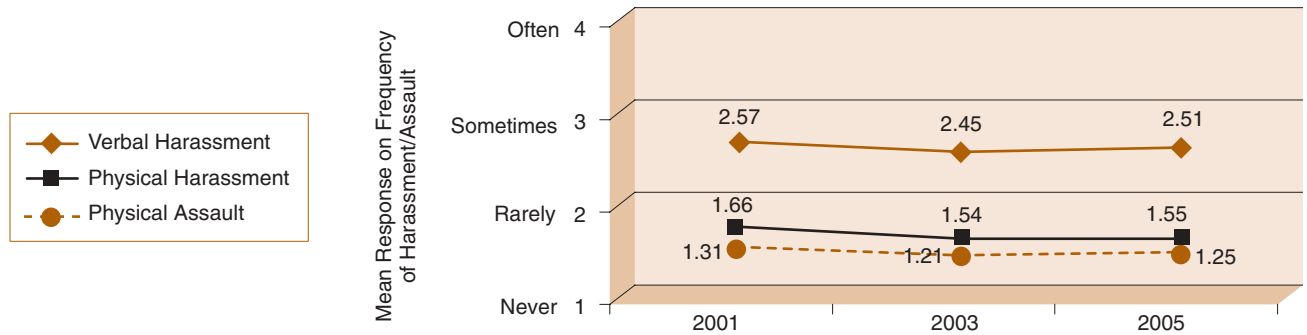


Figure 23. Harassment and Assault Based on Gender Expression by Year



Notes

- 10 Participants who indicated that harassment or assault had occurred "Rarely," "Sometimes," "Often" or "Frequently" were considered to have experienced it at least once in the past school year.
- 11 Human Rights Watch (2001). *Hatred in the Hallways: Violence and Discrimination Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students in U.S. Schools*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- 12 NCH (2005). *Putting U In The Picture: Mobile Bullying Survey 2005*. Available from the NCH website (www.nch.uk.org).
- 13 Differences between 2001 and 2005: Unsafe re: sexual orientation – $\chi^2=4.74$, $df=2$, $p<.05$; $\Phi=-.04$. Unsafe re: gender expression – $\chi^2=9.06$, $df=2$, $p<.05$; $\Phi=-.04$.
- 14 To test differences across years, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with the three harassment/assault dependent variables. The multivariate results were significant – Pillai's Trace=.004; $F(5,6926)=2.21$, $p<.05$. Resulting univariate analyses were considered significant at a 95% significance level.



Reporting of School-Based Victimization Events

There is no guarantee that reporting incidents of harassment and assault to school personnel will result in action taken or in systemic changes to improve school safety. However, if teachers or school staff are not informed about such events, they cannot intervene. Yet some LGBT students may not feel comfortable reporting harassment and assault for a myriad of reasons. For example, they may believe that school personnel will not be receptive, they may not feel comfortable discussing issues related to their sexual orientation or gender expression, or they may fear repercussions from other students. Family members of LGBT students may also intervene with school personnel if they are told about the victimization experiences. In the current survey, we asked those students who had experienced any incident of harassment or assault in their schools during the past year whether they had reported the incidents to faculty or school staff, their parents or guardians or other family members.

The majority of students who had been harassed or assaulted in school never reported it to school personnel or a family member. As illustrated in Figure 24, more than half of the students said that they had never told school authorities (58.6%), a parent or guardian (55.1%) or another family member (62.6%). Furthermore, when students had told a parent or guardian, only a little more than half (56.3%) said that the parent/guardian ever addressed the matter with school staff. In fact, only a quarter (28.1%) of students said that their parent or guardian intervened on their behalf with school personnel most or all of the time (see Table 6). Other family members were even less likely to intervene.

Figure 24. Frequency of Reporting Incidents of Harassment or Assault

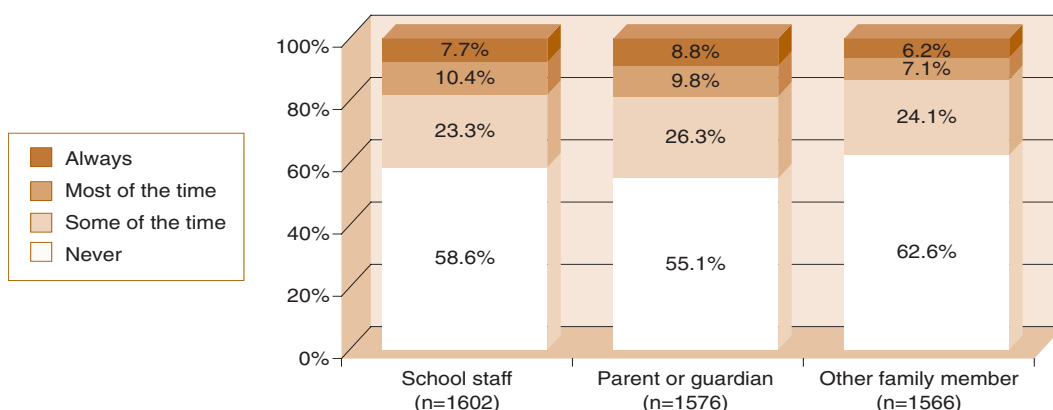


Table 6. Frequency of Intervention by Students' Family Members

	Parent/Guardian (n=708)	Other Family Members (n=589)
Never	43.6%	71.1%
Some of the Time	28.2%	16.8%
Most of Time	13.3%	4.8%
Always	14.8%	7.3%

Reasons for Not Reporting Harassment or Assault

Students who had said they never told school personnel about their experiences with harassment or assault were asked why they had not done so (see Table 7). Among those who provided an explanation, nearly a third (31.8%) of their comments were about how they believed that staff would not do anything to address the situation:

Teachers don't do anything. They say that you should ignore it and it's not their problem. (female student, 11th grade, from CT)

A few years ago I reported it, and no one did anything about it. I just don't do it now. (transgender student, 9th grade, from NC)

I did not report it because the teachers or [vice principal] or principal would not do anything about it. (male student, 10th grade, from CA)

I didn't think that any of the teachers would do anything about it. Our school doesn't have rules about harrassment when it comes to sexual orientation. (female student, 11th grade, from MI)

I was too afraid that they wouldnt do anything. When I tried nothing happened. (student with "other" gender identity, 11th grade, from WI)

Many of the students who said that faculty or staff at their school would not intervene thought it was due to the faculty or staff's own anti-LGBT beliefs:

Teachers and staff don't see my being bullied for being a lesbian as a big deal. They see words such as "dyke" and "queer" as common teenager slang, and even use the terms themselves on occasion. Most teachers refer to students as "acting gay" when students do something stupid... so telling a teacher makes no sense because they don't care. (female student, 11th grade, from NV)

They [school staff] don't approve and sometimes make fun of gays and lesbians. They wouldn't care. I tried once a few years ago to report an incident, but all they said was "go back to class." (female student, 12th grade, from TX)

I have heard some of my teachers making inappropriate comments about being gay/bisexual and so felt i could not approach them. (female student, 12th grade, from IL)

I didn't feel like it needed to be brought up. Besides, my principal was homophobic, and didn't want to be bothered with what he called "faggots." (male student, 10th grade, from GA)

I felt that the principal/majority of staff privately agreed with the offensive student(s) heterosexual actions on a personal basis and those feelings would greatly interfere with proper discipline, probably resulting in very little action (verbal warning). (male student, 11th grade, from TX)

Table 7. Reasons Students Did Not Report Incidents of Harassment or Assault to School Staff

Believed that nothing would be done to address the situation	31.9%	(n=253)
Staff is homophobic	16.6%	(n=42)
Felt that incident was not a big deal/not serious enough to report	21.8%	(n =173)
Fear of negative repercussions	17.9%	(n=142)
Resolved situation themselves	9.7%	(n=77)
Confidentiality issues (e.g., fear of being "outed")	5.9%	(n=47)
Hopeless situation (e.g., not worth reporting because staff would not be able to stop harassment)	5.7%	(n=45)
Too embarrassed/ashamed/uncomfortable	5.0%	(n=40)
Administrative barriers (e.g., reporting process was very time-consuming; "proof" of incident required)	3.7%	(n=29)
Did not want to make a big deal and draw attention to self	2.3%	(n=18)
Did not want to be labeled a "nark"/"snitch"/"cry-baby"	2.0%	(n=16)
Harassment is commonplace	1.8%	(n=14)
Felt sympathy for perpetrator	0.8%	(n=6)
Did not know that they could report incident to school staff	0.4%	(n=3)
Other reasons	4.0%	(n=32)

Do not feel comfortable with staff members due to the highly homophobic nature of some staff from reactions to events like the Day of Silence. (male student, 10th grade, from AZ)

Many of the comments (17.9%) reflected students' fear that reporting the harassment or assault would have negative repercussions—they would be harassed or assaulted even more because the perpetrators would learn that they told faculty or staff:

Because I was afraid I would not be heard and the kids would find out. Then I'd be beat up again. (transgender student, 12th grade, from MA)

I wasn't sure if anyone would do anything. It would probably just make things worse. (female student, 11th grade, from SC)

They wouldn't do anything about, plus I would end up getting ganged up on later. (female student, 11th grade, from VA)

My sophomore year some people harassed me every single day and when I told someone on staff they told the students to leave me alone and get back to class. And then it got worst because the students knew who went to them and it was just absolutely horrible. (male student, 11th grade, from TX)

I didn't think it would help, it would only make it worse, because then I would be a "snitch" in the eyes of the other students. (female student, 10th grade, from MI)

Some LGBT students expressed concern that reporting to school personnel that they were harassed or assaulted because of their sexual orientation or gender expression would result in being "outed" either to others in the school community or to their family members (5.9%):

If I were to report the harassment, I would find it would only explode the situation, and would cause for parents to come to the school, and my sexuality to be disclosed to my father (my mother knows). Furthermore, I do not want specific teachers and staff to know about my sexual preference, for fear that they would in the end harass me, as I know some already do. (male student, 11th grade, from AZ)

Because it would cause more harm than good. Due to the fact that I try to hide my bisexuality in this climate, if I complain about being harassed for it, it spreads the secrets and rumors even more. Since they are simply words, its easier to not be bothered by them. (male student, 11th grade, from MD)

Because I was not out and was just too embarrassed. (male student, 12th grade, from LA)

I didn't want school authorities to be made aware of my orientation so they wouldn't tell my mom anything. (male student, 12th grade, from MI)

I'm too afraid to say anything. Most of the time, it seems as though the school staff doesn't care. Worse yet, I'm afraid they might say something to my parents. They don't know that kids bother me this way in school. (female student, 10th grade, from DE)

Many students commented that they did not report harassment to school authorities because the incident was not a “big deal” or serious enough to report (21.8%) or that they handled the situation themselves (9.7%). It may be that the events were truly minor. However, it may also be that some students have a high tolerance for victimization events in school or have become so inured to such experiences that they do not feel the need for intervention or feel hopeless that the school climate could ever improve. In fact, some students in the survey expressed that they did not report incidents of harassment because they felt the situation was hopeless:

It's pointless. What can they do? They can give detentions and suspensions, but they can't change a person, so in a way, they're completely powerless. (female student, 11th grade, from OH)

Because I'll be the only person reporting anything. If I'm the only one, what's going to get done? (female student, 9th grade, from AL)

We did not ask students in the survey to describe their actual experiences with harassment or assault, and therefore, we cannot examine the qualitative nature of the victimization events among those students who said it was not serious. Further research is needed to examine in greater depth how students cope with and address school-based harassment.

Students' Report on the Nature of Intervention by School Personnel

In the 2005 NSCS, students who said that they had reported incidents of victimization to school staff were asked how effective it was to do so. As shown in Figure 25, less than half (43.8%) of students who reported incidents of victimization to school staff said that the actions taken by school authorities to address the situation were effective.

Students were asked to describe what happened when they reported these events to teachers or school staff (see Table 8). Among those students who provided descriptions, nearly a quarter (23.0%) reported that staff did nothing to effectively address the issue:

Nothing, they said they would look at the security camera tapes and would give disciplinary action if what happened was what I said. It never happened. (female student, 11th grade, from KS)

Usually nothing, since they thought the incidents were minor. (female student, 9th grade, from MN)

He said he took care of it, but I know he didn't. Because nothing happened to the boy who assaulted me. (female student, 10th grade, from MI)

Figure 25. Effectiveness of Reporting Incidents of Victimization to a Teacher, Principal or Other School Staff
(n=640)

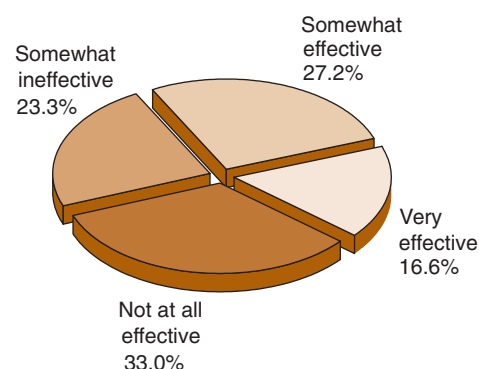


Table 8. School Staff's Responses to Students' Reports of Harassment or Assault

Nothing/no action was taken	23.0%	(N =129)
Staff talked to/confronted perpetrator(s) (e.g., told them to stop)	21.8%	(N =122)
Said that they would take care of it/deal with it/keep an eye on situation	10.5%	(N =59)
Took report seriously and took steps to address situation	9.3%	(N =52)
Notified principal/other school authorities	9.1%	(N =51)
Perpetrator given detention/suspended/expelled	8.4%	(N =47)
Blamed student who reported the harassment/assault	5.9%	(N =33)
Documented the incident (e.g., harasser was "written up")	4.6%	(N =26)
Told student to ignore it/forget about it	4.1%	(N =23)
Arranged a meeting (e.g., peer mediation; parent-teacher meeting)	3.4%	(N =19)
Generally listened supportively to student	3.0%	(N =17)
Said to tell them if it happened again	2.1%	(N =12)
Told student to report incident to other staff	2.0%	(N =11)
Notified police	1.3%	(N =7)
Moved student's seat away from harasser	0.7%	(N =4)
Other reasons	5.0%	(N =28)

Pretty much nothing. My issue was generally dismissed and ignored. (male student, 8th grade, from FL)

They didn't seem to care much or believed I was overreacting. (female student, 11th grade, from FL)

Said they would take it to the principal, but that never happened. (transgender student, 12th grade, from GA)

"Not much we can do about it, boys will be boys." (male student, 11th grade, from CO)

Most of the time, he/she did absolutely nothing. It's quite rare when a teacher actually intervenes, and it's not effective when they do. (male student, 9th grade, from PA)

In about a quarter (21.8%) of the responses, students said that school staff talked to or confronted the perpetrator(s), often telling them to stop their behavior and warning them of further disciplinary action. Some students (10.5%) reported that staff said that they would "look into it" or "keep an eye on the situation" but did not comment on whether or not "looking into it" had any effect of their school experiences. Less than 10% of students reported that teachers or staff notified the principal or other school authorities about the incident (9.1%), or that the perpetrator was given detention or was suspended or expelled (8.4%).

There were some students (5.9%) who reported that school staff blamed them for the harassment, often because of their sexual orientation or because they expressed their gender in a way that was considered inappropriate by school staff.

They assume that because of my sexual orientation, that I know that I'm going to get harassed, so I can deal with it. Like I brought it on myself, or something. (female student, 9th grade, from NY)

Told me to get over it, basically. That maybe if I acted more like a girl that I wouldn't get harassed so often. (female student, 11th grade, from VA)

They told me I needed to read the bible. This happened at [school district] in Texas. They said that unfortunately there were consequences for living the life I have chosen. (male student, 12th grade, from TX)

Told me I need to keep my "lifestyle" to myself and not publicize or "flaunt" it. (male student, 12th grade, from AR)

They said I brought it upon myself for being a lesbian. (female student, 9th grade, from MD)

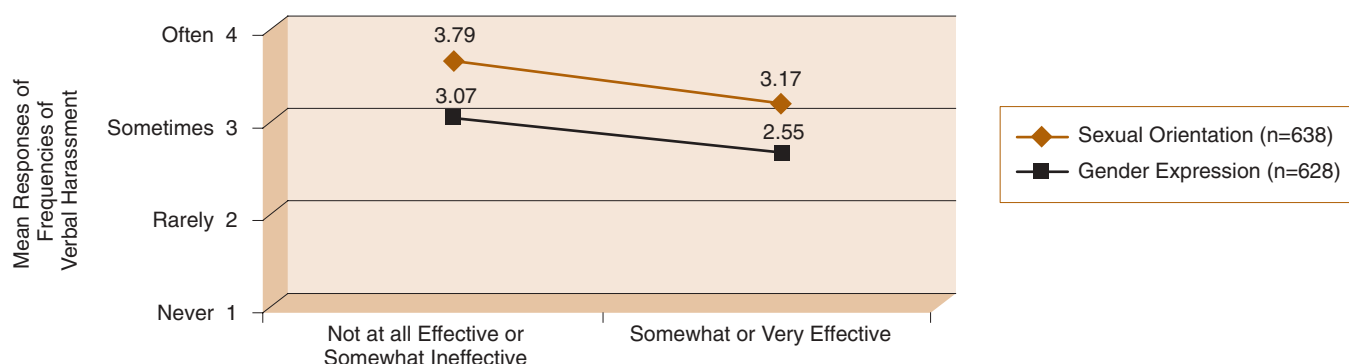
They would say that, if it was a guy, that they were just fooling around, and if it was a girl making the comment, then I must have provoked it. (male student, 12th grade, from TX)

Called my parents, talked to me about how to best "blend in" with my peers. Kept asking what I had done to make myself a victim...(female student, 12th grade, from WA)

Not only did LGBT students experience harassment and assault in school, but many of these students did not report such events to school authorities because they believed that staff would fail to address the situation effectively or that reporting it would make the situation worse. Furthermore, many students who did tell a teacher or other school staff about having been harassed/assaulted reported that staff did not take appropriate action.

When teachers, principals and other school staff effectively respond to reports of harassment, their actions may benefit not only the individual who has been harassed, but they may also positively affect the overall climate of the school. As shown in Figure 26, students who said that school staff effectively addressed the situation when learning about an incident of harassment or assault also reported experiencing

Figure 26. Experiences of Verbal Harassment by Effectiveness of School Staff's Responses to Incidents



lower frequencies of verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation or gender expression.¹⁵ Faculty/staff effective interventions may send a message to the entire student body, and perhaps to would-be perpetrators in particular, that harassment is not tolerated at their school.

Notes

¹⁵ Differences were examined using independent samples t-tests: verbal harassment re: sexual orientation – $t(636)=6.01$, $p<.001$; verbal harassment re: gender expression – $t(626)=4.40$, $p<.001$.



Participation in School Events/School Engagement

In order to examine students' sense of belonging to their school community, survey participants were given a series of statements about feeling a part of their school and were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with the statements.¹⁶ Table 9 shows the mean (average) response for each question, as well as the percentage of students who agreed with the statement (those reporting "Agree" or "Strongly Agree"). LGBT students were more likely to agree with statements that reflected positive feelings from teachers and they were less likely to agree with statements about feeling like a part of their school, that they can be themselves in school or that they feel accepted.

Even when students feel safe from physical harm in school, they may not be comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation or transgender status and, therefore, may not be able to participate in school activities as fully as do their peers. Most students in the 2005 survey reported that they were "out" or open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity to most or all of their school community (see Figure 27). However, some students were not completely comfortable being "out" at school—over a third (39.7%) reported that they were not "out" to anyone or were "out" to only a few people.

Some LGBT students may also feel that they cannot acknowledge their sexual orientation or gender identity because it may single them out for harassment by their peers. There were significant differences by students' degree of being "out" at school and experiences of harassment related to their sexual orientation. Students who were more "out" tended to report higher frequencies of verbal and physical harassment than students who were less open about their sexual orientation at school (see Figure 28).¹⁷

Table 9. School Belonging: Items from the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale

Item	Agree or Strongly Agree	Mean (S.D)^a	n
The teachers respect me.	82.2%	3.07 (0.76)	1697
People at my school know I can do good work.	82.2%	3.11 (0.78)	1699
There's at least one teacher or other adult in my school that I can talk to if I have a problem.	80.9%	3.19 (0.93)	1706
Teachers at my school are not interested in people like me. (reverse coded) ^b	76.7%	2.95 (0.81)	1697
Most teachers at my school are interested in me.	76.0%	2.97 (0.81)	1699
People at my school are friendly to me.	73.9%	2.88 (0.81)	1703
Other students at my school like me the way I am.	68.3%	2.79 (0.86)	1697
People at my school notice when I'm good at something.	64.1%	2.74 (0.89)	1705
I am treated with as much respect as other students.	61.9%	2.70 (0.91)	1699
Other students in my school take my opinions seriously.	60.2%	2.64 (0.84)	1695
I wish I were in a different school (reverse coded). ^b	54.7%	2.51 (1.09)	1701
I feel like a real part of my school.	54.5%	2.56 (0.95)	1709
I am included in lots of activities at my school.	54.4%	2.59 (0.99)	1706
I can really be myself at school.	47.7%	2.44 (1.02)	1704
It is hard for people like me to be accepted at my school (reverse coded). ^b	47.4%	2.39 (0.95)	1699
I feel proud of belonging to my school.	46.9%	2.37 (1.00)	1694
Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong at my school (reverse coded). ^b	34.0%	2.17 (0.99)	1705
I feel very different from the other students. (reverse coded) ^b	31.9%	2.07 (0.94)	1703

^a S.D. = standard deviation, a statistical measure of how much variance there is on a particular variable, i.e., how much are participants similar or different in their responses.

^b Reverse coding means that the question was worded in the opposite direction of most of the other questions. In this scale, the reverse coded questions were worded in the negative. In order to compare them to the positive items and to create an average measure of school belonging, the scores associated with these items were reversed. So, it reflects a positive statement. For example, "I feel very different from other students," after reverse coding, can be interpreted as "I DO NOT feel very different from other students."

Being more open about one's sexual orientation in school may also have a positive effect on one's educational experience. "Outness" was also related to greater sense of being a part of one's school. Students who were "out" to most or all of their school also reported a greater sense of school belonging than students who were either not "out" at all or "out" to only a few.¹⁸ Also, even though students were more likely to be harassed the more "out" they were, they were also more likely to report incidents of harassment and assault to school staff and to family members (see Figure 29).¹⁹ For example, more than a quarter (27.3%) of students who were "out" to everyone said that they reported incidents of harassment/assault to school staff most of the time or always. In contrast, only about 10% of students who were not "out" or out to only a few people reported incidents as frequently. Although students who were "out" at school about their sexual orientation and/or

Figure 27. Degree of Being "Out" at School
(n=1708)

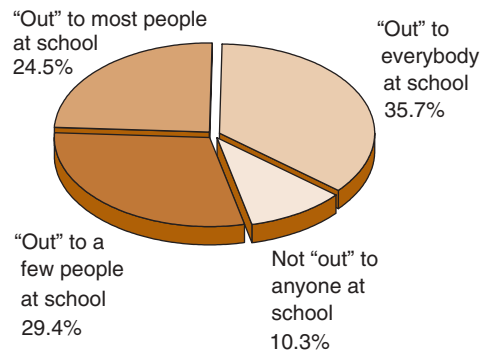


Figure 28. Experiences of Harassment Based on Sexual Orientation by Degree of "Outness" at School

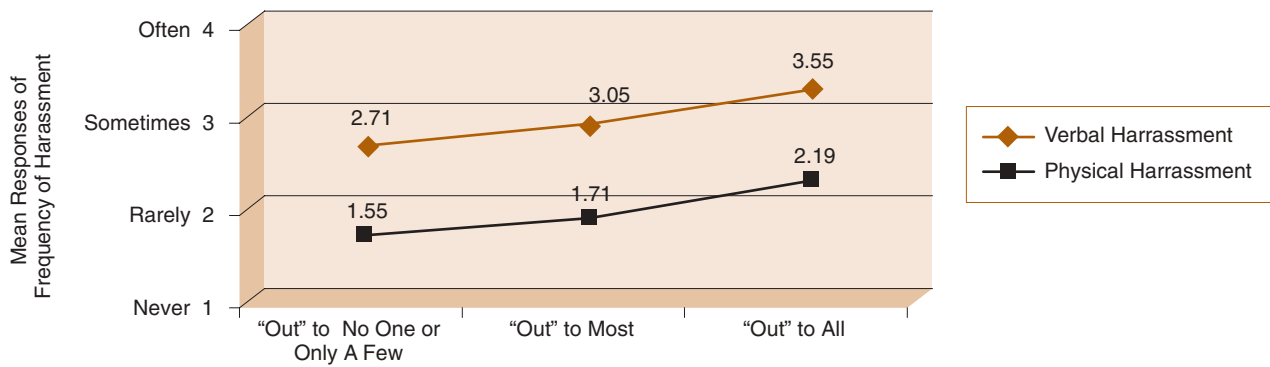


Figure 29. Reporting Victimization Events by Degree of "Outness" at School

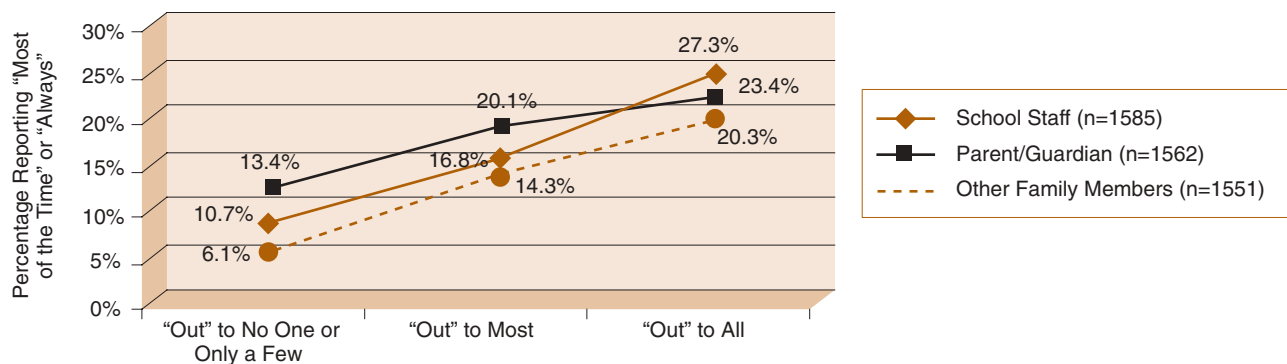
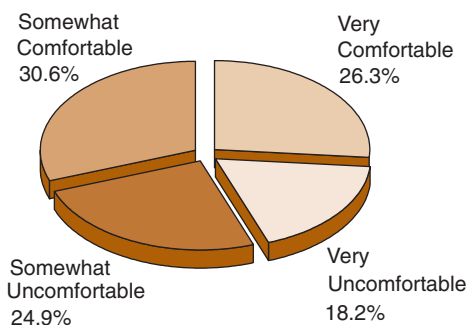


Figure 30. Comfort with Raising LGBT Issues in Class
(n=1701)



gender identity may experience higher frequencies of harassment, already being “out” may lessen their apprehension when it comes to reporting incidents to adults (e.g., a student may not be afraid that telling their teacher will result in their peers or parents discovering their sexual orientation, and therefore, may be more comfortable reporting an incident).

For all students, being able to participate more fully in one’s school experience may be related to a greater sense of school belonging. As part of their class participation, LGBT students may want to raise issues related to the LGBT community, such as the discussion of an LGBT historical figure in a social studies class. Thus, we asked students how comfortable they would feel raising LGBT issues in their classes and nearly half (43.1%) said that they would be uncomfortable (see Figure 30). Some LGBT students may feel that they cannot raise LGBT issues in their classes because of a hostile school climate—students who were either “out” to no one or only a few people at school were less likely to report feeling comfortable raising these issues in class than those students who were “out” to most or all of the school (46.1% vs. 71.2%).²⁰ Students who were uncomfortable raising LGBT issues in class also reported a lower sense of school belonging compared to others.²¹

Notes

16 The scale used was Psychological Sense of School Membership scale [Goodenow, C. (1993). The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: scale development and educational correlates. *Psychology in the Schools*, 30, 79–80.]. Responses ranged from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree” corresponding to values of one to four, respectively. We averaged all item responses to obtain a single indicator ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 0.34$). The measure had high internal consistency ($\alpha = .92$).

17 To test differences based on degree of “outness,” a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all harassment and assault variables as dependent variables. The multivariate results were significant – Pillai’s Trace=.13; $F(44,3040)=3.25$, $p<.001$. Given the large sample size, we considered statistical significance and effect size in reporting these results.

18 Means on school belonging were 2.77 for “Out” to most or all vs. 2.65 for “Out” to none or few, $t(1711)=-7.02$, $p<.001$.

19 Reporting to Teacher: $\chi^2=55.56$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.19$. Reporting to Parent/Guardian: $\chi^2=20.01$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.11$. Reporting to Other Family Member: $\chi^2=51.74$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.18$.

20 $\chi^2=110.32$, $df=1$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.25$.

21 Means on school belonging were 2.80 for “Somewhat/Very Comfortable” vs. 2.62 for “Somewhat/Very Uncomfortable,” $t(1698)=-10.98$, $p<.001$.



Academic Achievement and College Aspirations for LGBT Students

In the 2005 survey, we asked students about their academic achievement as well as their aspirations for post-secondary education in order to examine further the relationship between school safety and achievement. Figure 31 compares educational plans of high school seniors from a study by the National Center for Education Statistics with the subsample of LGBT high school seniors from the GLSEN survey.²² The percentage of LGBT students who planned on pursuing a postgraduate degree (e.g., Master's degree, JD, MD, PhD) was larger than in the national sample (50.2% vs. 39.6%, respectively). However, the percentage of LGBT students who were not planning to pursue any post-secondary education (obtaining only a high school diploma or not finishing high school) was twice as high as the percentage in the national sample (12.3% vs. 6.6%, respectively).²³ It is important to note that the GLSEN survey only included students who had been in school during the 2004–2005 school year. Therefore, the percentage of LGBT students not pursuing post-secondary education would be higher with the inclusion of those students who have already dropped out of school.

These differences between our sample of LGBT students and the national sample of all high school students may be related to the higher incidence of in-school victimization reported by LGBT students. The LGBT students in our survey who were frequently harassed in school were more likely to miss entire days of school because of feeling unsafe. As shown in Figure 32, students were twice as likely to report having missed a day of school in the past

Figure 31. Educational Aspirations: LGBT Students vs. General Population of Students
(percentage for seniors only)

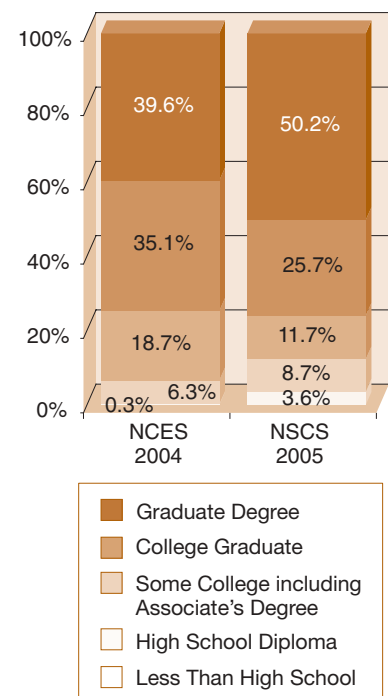
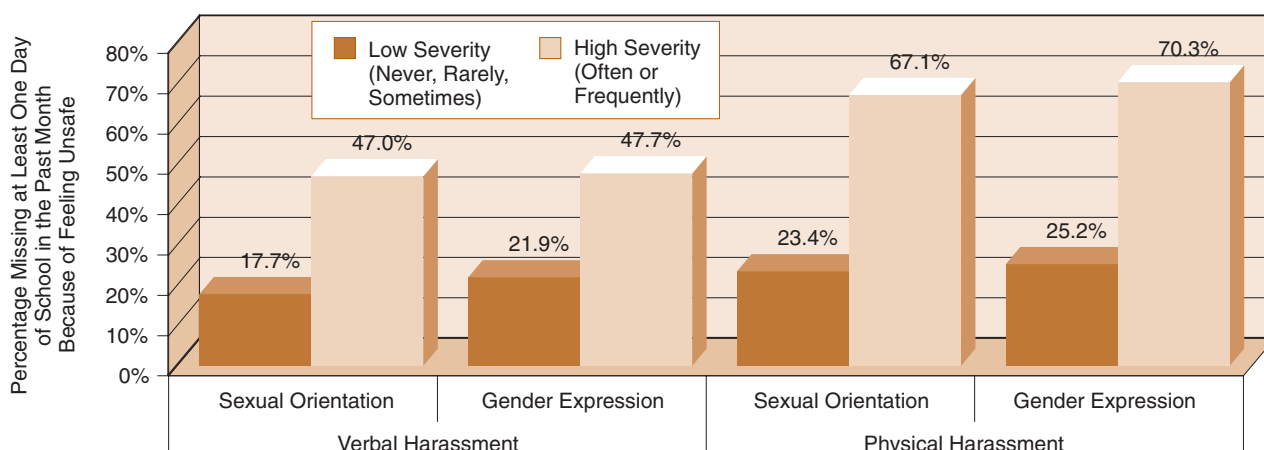


Figure 32. Relationship Between Severity of In-School Harassment and Missing Days of School
(n=1662)



month if they experienced more frequent verbal harassment (frequently or often) related to their sexual orientation (47.0% vs. 17.7%) or their gender expression (47.7% vs. 21.9%) than other students.²⁴ With regard to physical harassment, the effect was even stronger—students were nearly three times more likely to report missing school if they experienced more frequent physical harassment based on their sexual orientation (67.1% vs. 23.4%) and their gender expression (70.3% vs. 25.2%) than their peers.²⁵

Feeling unsafe in school and missing school because of safety concerns may also result in poorer educational outcomes for some LGBT students. Thus, in the 2005 survey, we asked students about their academic achievement as well as their aspirations for post-secondary education in order to examine further the relationship between school safety and achievement. As shown in Figure 33, higher frequencies of harassment because of their sexual orientation or gender expression were associated with students' plans not to continue their education after high school:

- Students who reported verbal harassment frequently or often because of their sexual orientation were more likely to report that they did not plan to attend college than students who reported experiencing such harassment less often (12.7% vs. 9.3%);²⁶
- Students who reported physical harassment frequently or often because of their sexual orientation were more likely to report that they did not plan to attend college than students who reported experiencing such harassment less often (15.5% vs. 9.9%);²⁷ and
- Students who reported physical harassment frequently or often because of their gender expression were two times more likely to report that they did not plan to attend college than other students (19.0% vs. 9.8%).²⁸

The frequency of harassment in school was also related to lower achievement among these LGBT students. As shown in Figure 34, the reported grade point average of students who were more frequently harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression was significantly lower than for students who were less often harassed.²⁹ This finding was particularly striking when the harassment was physical in nature. The average GPA for students who were frequently or often physically harassed because of their sexual orientation or their gender expression was about a half grade lower than for other students (2.6 vs. 3.1).

Figure 33. Relationship Between Educational Aspirations and Severity of Harassment Experiences in School

(n=1662) (unless indicated, all differences statistically significant)

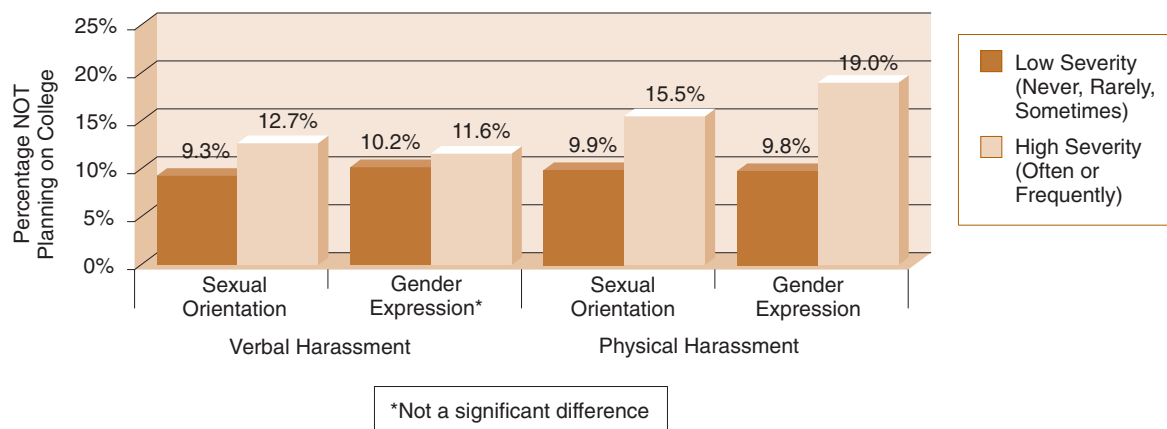
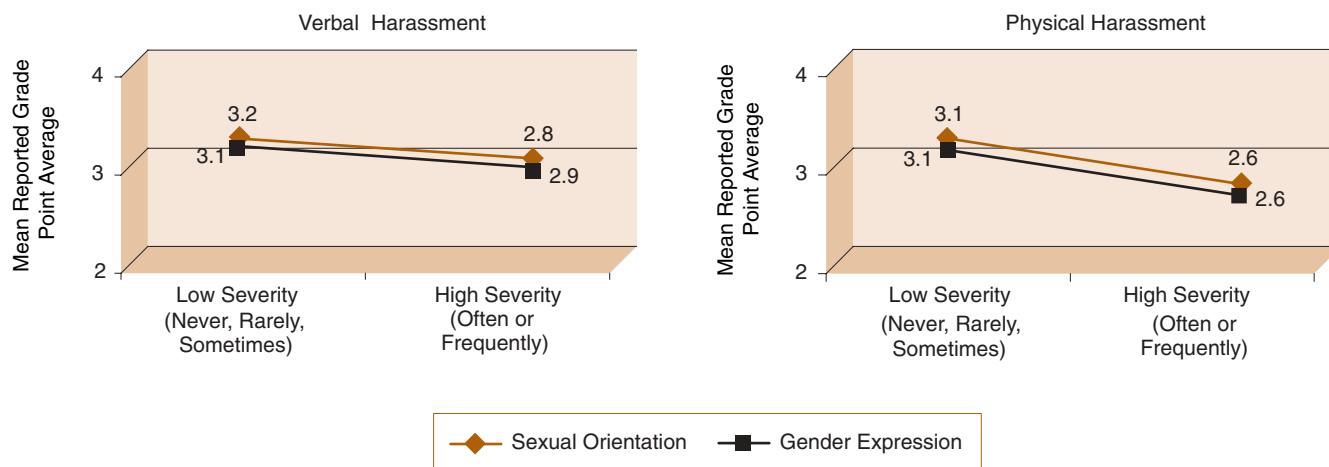


Figure 34. Academic Achievement and Severity of Harassment in School



Notes

- 22 Education Longitudinal Study: 2002/04 Data Files and Electronic Codebook System. (First follow-up) [ECB/CD-ROM Public Use]. (2005). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Services [Producer and Distributor].
- 23 Goodness of Fit Chi-Square Test was used to compare the percentage of students in the NSCS who did not plan on college with the percentage from the national population: $\chi^2=49.25$, $df=1$, $p<.001$.
- 24 Sexual Orientation: $\chi^2=169.00$, $df=1$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.31$; Gender Expression: $\chi^2=107.34$, $df=1$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.25$.
- 25 Sexual Orientation: $\chi^2=177.62$, $df=1$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.32$; Gender Expression: $\chi^2=125.83$, $df=1$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.27$.
- 26 $\chi^2=5.73$, $df=1$, $p<.05$ $\Phi=.06$.
- 27 $\chi^2=7.10$, $df=1$, $p<.01$; $\Phi=.07$.
- 28 $\chi^2=10.38$, $df=1$, $p<.01$; $\Phi=.08$.
- 29 Differences were examined using independent samples t-tests: verbal harassment re: sexual orientation – $t(1703)=7.34$, $p<.001$; verbal harassment re: gender expression – $t(1678)=4.88$, $p<.001$; physical harassment re: sexual orientation – $t(1701)=6.99$, $p<.001$; physical harassment re: gender expression – $t(1685)=5.61$, $p<.001$.



Demographic Comparisons on School Safety, Harassment and Assault

GLSEN's mission is to make all schools safe for all students. Whereas most LGBT students experience harassment in school based on their sexual orientation, many experience further harassment based on other personal characteristics, such as race/ethnicity or gender. Thus, we examined whether there were demographic differences in the experience of school climate based on race/ethnicity and gender in order to understand more fully the experiences of LGBT students in their schools.

Comparisons by Race and Ethnicity

Feeling Unsafe in School. With regard to feelings of safety in school, there were important differences between white students and students of color, and between the various racial/ethnic categories of students (see Figure 35):

- LGBT students of color were more likely than white LGBT students to feel unsafe at school because of their race or ethnicity (16.6% versus 3.8%).³⁰
- White and Native American students were more likely than others to report feeling unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation.³¹
- Students who were Native American were also likelier than students from other racial/ethnic backgrounds to report feeling unsafe in school due to their actual or perceived religion.³²

Figure 35. Feelings of Safety at School by Race/Ethnicity

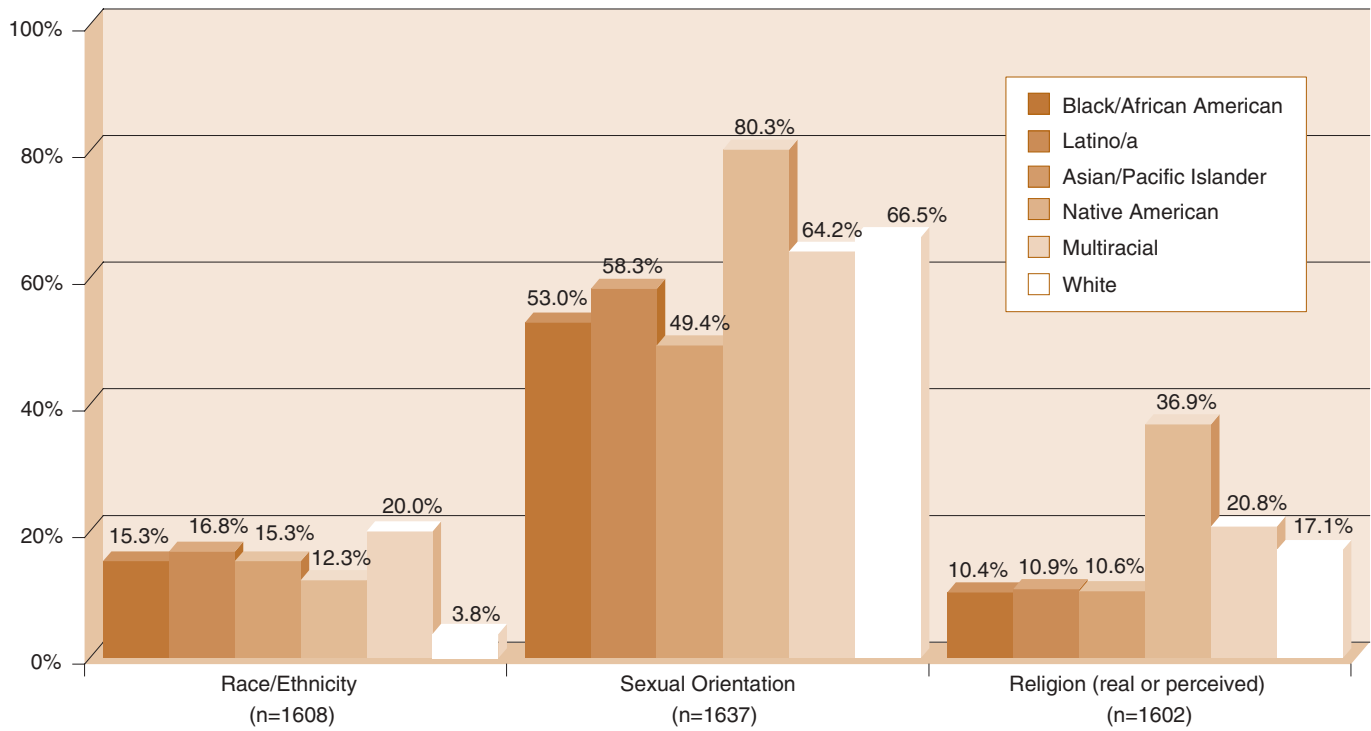
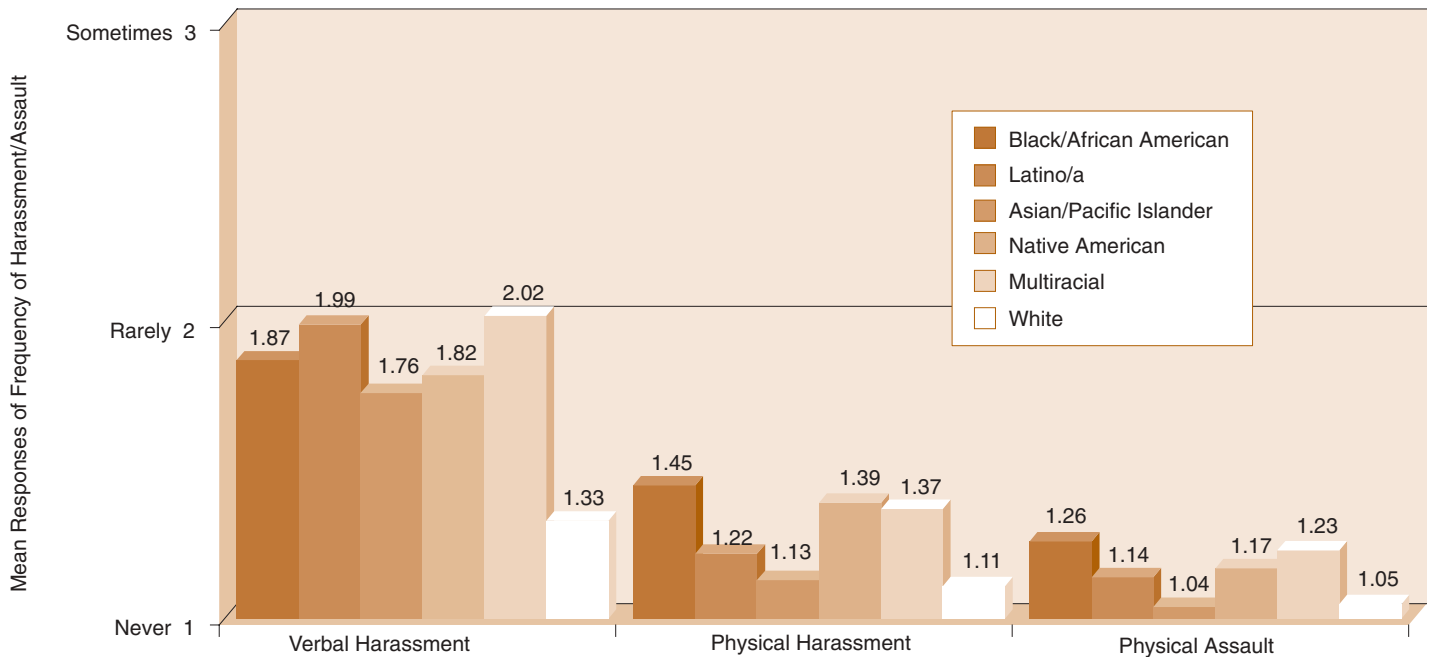


Figure 36. Frequencies of Harassment and Assault Because of Race/Ethnicity by Racial/Ethnic Group



Harassment and Assault. As with feelings of safety in school, there were significant differences in experiences of harassment and assault by racial/ethnic group.³³ Figure 36 shows differences across groups in harassment and assault because of race or ethnicity:

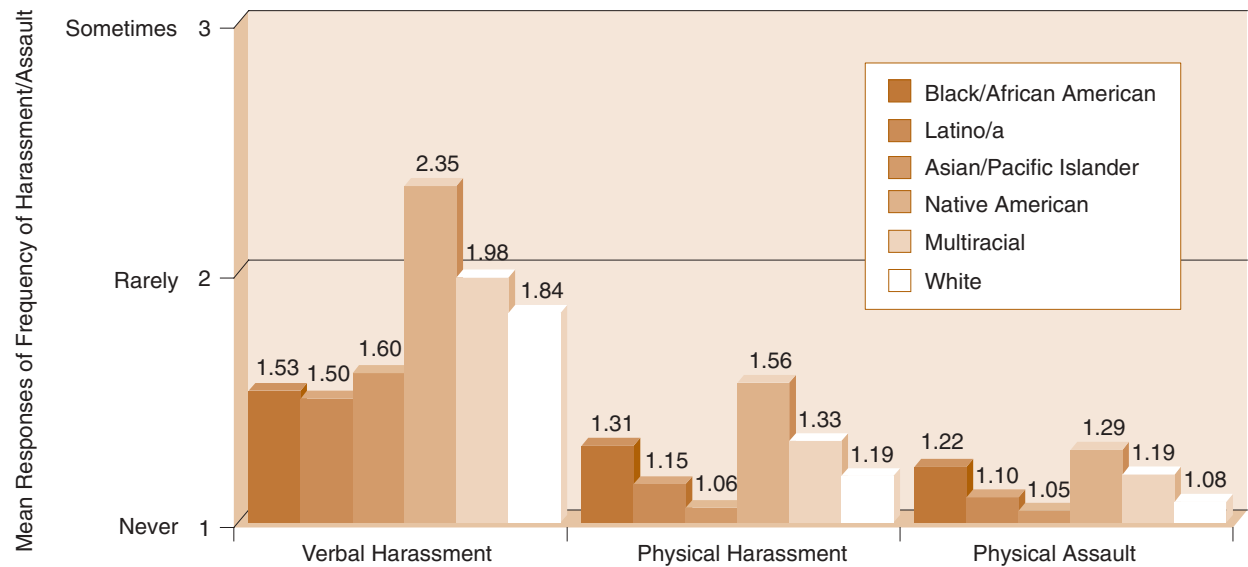
- Students of color experienced higher frequencies of verbal harassment related to their race or ethnicity than white students.
- White students also experienced lower frequencies of physical harassment and assault because of their race/ethnicity than Black/African American, Native American and multiracial students.
- Black/African American and Native American students experienced higher frequencies of physical harassment than Latino/a and Asian or Pacific Islander students.
- Black/African American students reported the highest frequency of physical assault because of race/ethnicity.

There were also significant differences across racial/ethnic groups with regard to the frequency of harassment or assault related to one’s actual or perceived religion (see Figure 37):

- Native American students reported the highest frequencies of harassment and assault because of religion.
- In addition, white and multiracial students reported higher frequencies of verbal harassment than Black/African American and Latino/a students.

LGBT students in our survey differed in their reports of having their property stolen or deliberately damaged at school by race/ethnicity. Native American and multiracial students reported higher frequencies of having their property stolen or deliberately damaged at school than students of other racial/ethnic backgrounds.³⁴

Figure 37. Frequencies of Harassment and Assault Because of Actual or Perceived Religion by Racial/Ethnic Group



Comparisons by Gender

Feeling Unsafe in School. As shown in Table 10, there were significant gender differences in feeling unsafe in school because of one's sexual orientation, gender and gender expression.³⁵ The percentage of male students who reported feeling unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation was higher than female and transgender students. Transgender students were more likely to report feeling unsafe because of their gender and their gender expression than male and female students. Female students were more likely than male students to report feeling unsafe because of their gender but less likely to report feeling unsafe because of their gender expression.

Harassment and Assault. There were significant differences by gender in reported experiences of verbal and physical harassment and physical assault related to sexual orientation, gender and gender expression (see Figures 38 to 40):³⁶

- Transgender students tended to report higher frequencies of harassment and assault overall as did students with other gender identities, such as genderqueer.
- Males students tended to report higher frequencies of harassment and assault related to their sexual orientation and gender expression.
- Female students tended to report higher frequencies of harassment related to their gender.
- Gender differences were more pronounced regarding harassment and assault related to one's gender and to one's gender expression than sexual orientation.

Table 10. Feeling Unsafe at School by Gender

	Reasons for Feeling Unsafe in School		
	Sexual Orientation	Gender	Gender Expression
Female	62.0%	11.5%	32.9%
Male	68.3%	2.9%	44.3%
Transgender	54.7%	38.3%	73.2%
Other Gender Identity	70.6%	24.2%	63.2%

Figure 38. Experiences of Verbal Harassment by Gender

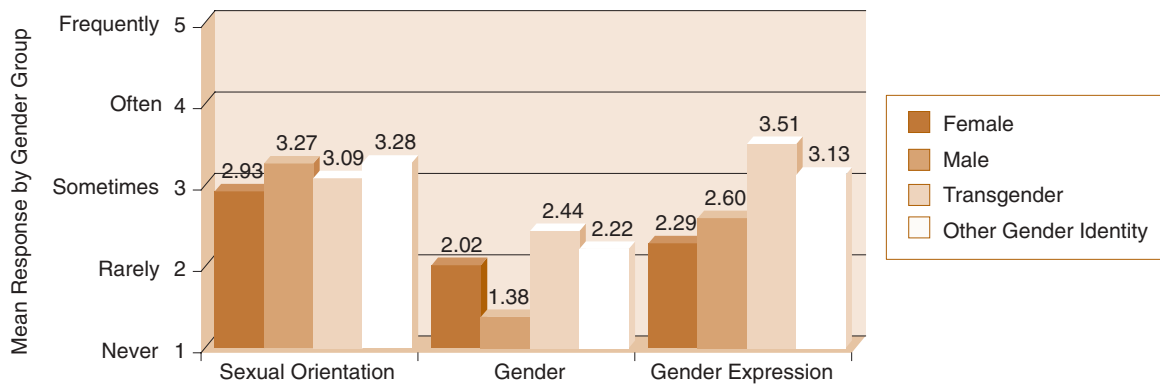


Figure 39. Experiences of Physical Harassment by Gender

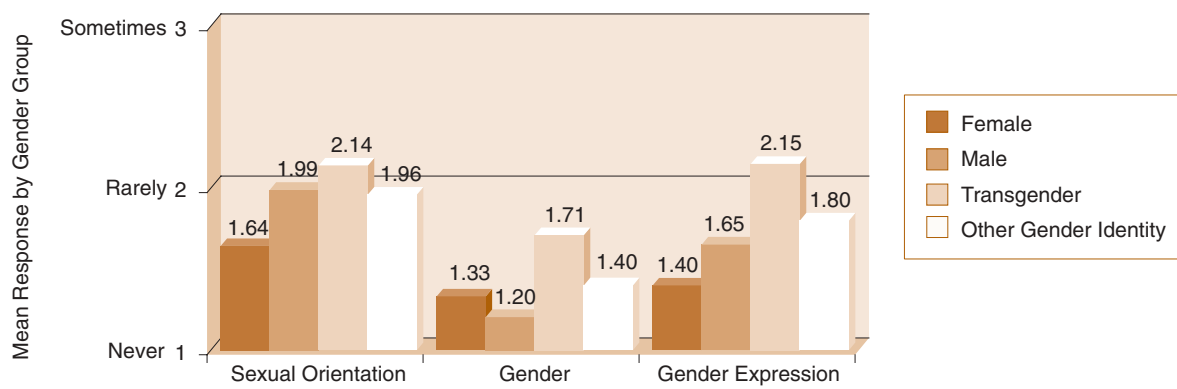
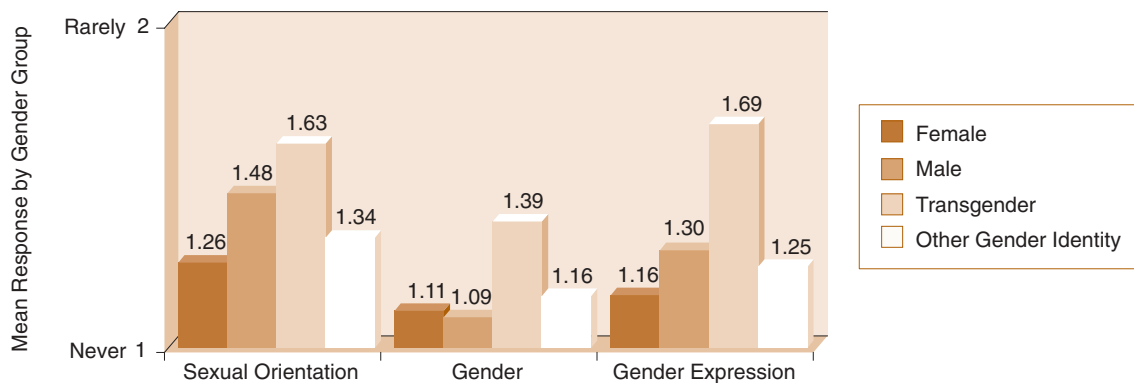


Figure 40. Experiences of Physical Assault by Gender



Comparisons by Region

We were also interested in whether there were regional differences with regard to biased language, school safety and experiences of harassment and assault. With regard to biased language in school, there were significant regional differences in the frequency of homophobic and racist remarks.³⁷ As shown in Figure 41, students from the Northeast and West reported, on average, a lower frequency of homophobic remarks than students in the South or Midwest. Students from the South reported the highest incidence of racist remarks compared to all other regions and students from the Midwest reported more frequent racist remarks than students in the Northeast and West.

There were also regional differences in the frequency with which students reported that teachers intervened regarding biased language.³⁸ As shown in Figure 42, students from the South reported a lower frequency, on average, of teachers intervening regarding homophobic and racist remarks.³⁹

We examined whether students varied by region in their reports of feeling unsafe in school because of personal characteristics. The only significant regional difference was with students' feeling unsafe because of their religion. As shown in Figure 43, students from the South and Midwest were more likely to report feeling unsafe than other students.

We examined whether there were regional differences in the incidences of harassment and assault and found significant differences in verbal harassment with regard to sexual orientation, race/ethnicity and religion.⁴⁰ As shown in Figure 44, students from the Northeast and West had lower reports on harassment related to sexual orientation and religion than students from the South and Midwest. Students from the South and West reported higher levels of racially-based harassment than students from the Northeast and Midwest.

Figure 41. Regional Differences in Biased Language Heard in School: Homophobic and Racist Remarks

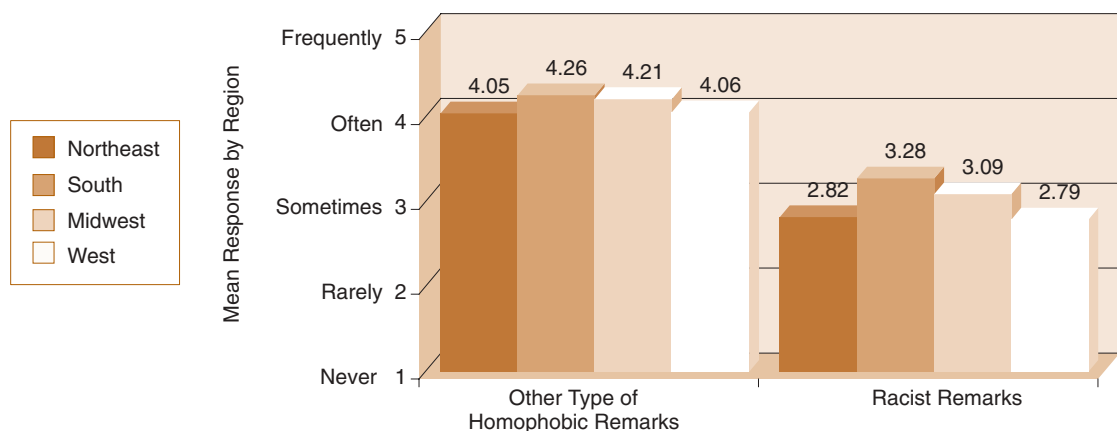


Figure 42. Regional Differences in Teachers' Intervention Re: Biased Language in School: Homophobic and Racist Remarks

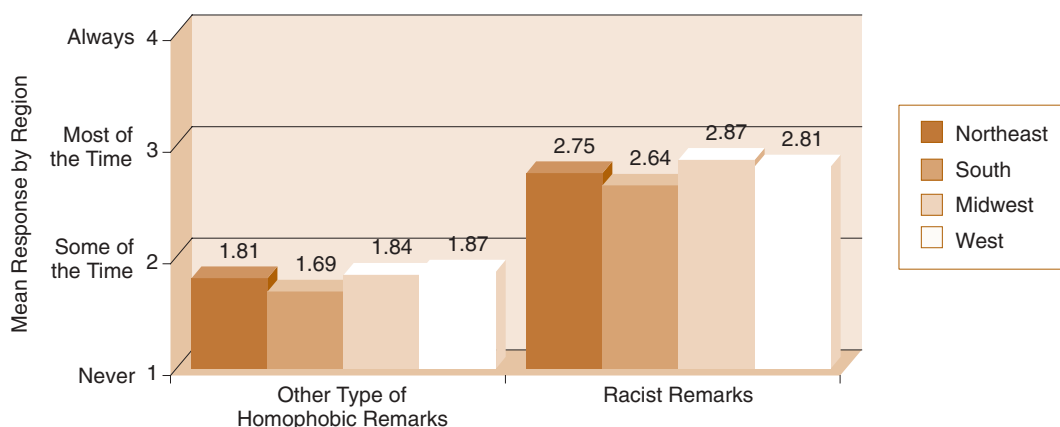


Figure 43. Regional Differences: Feeling Unsafe Because of One's Religion

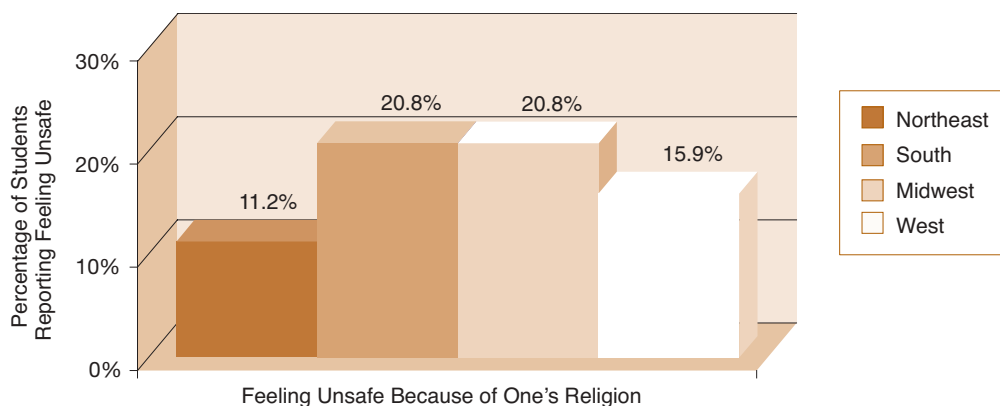
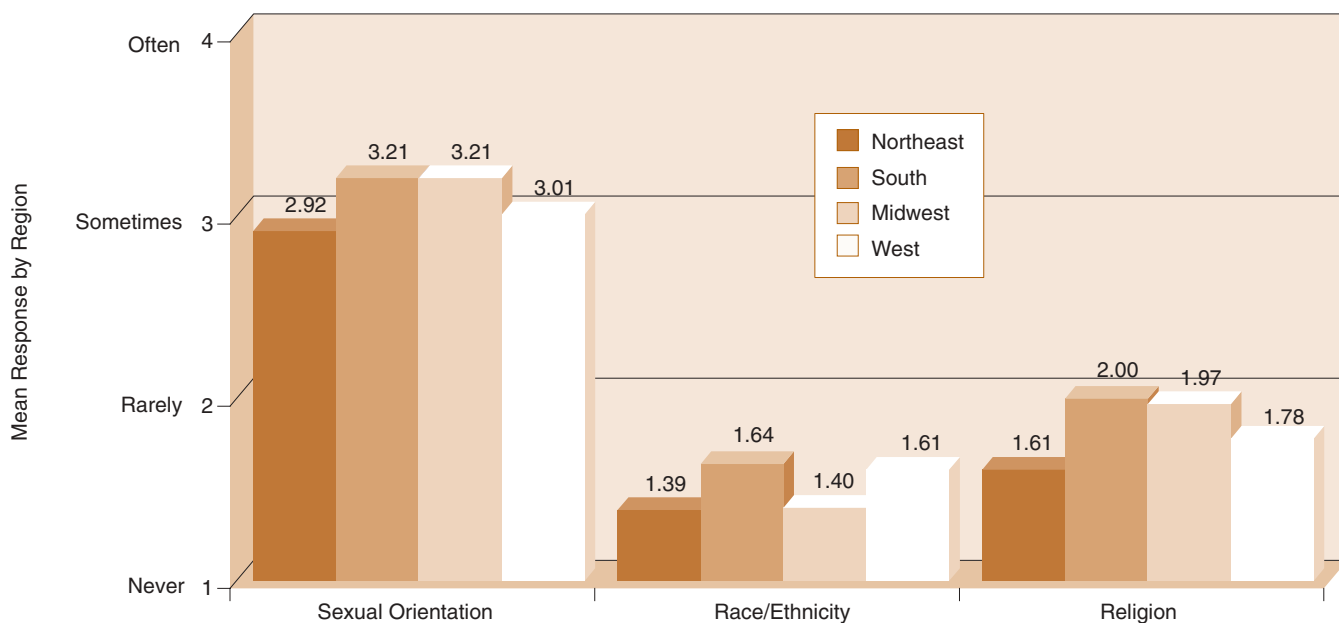


Figure 44. Regional Differences in the Frequency of Verbal Harassment in School



The differences in racist language and harassment based on race/ethnicity may, in part, be because the percentage of students of color varied by region. There were more students of color in the South and West (35.2% and 37.1%, respectively) compared to the Northeast and Midwest (25.6% and 26.3%, respectively). Students of color may be more attuned to racist remarks made in school and may be likelier targets for harassment because of their race/ethnicity. In fact, when we examined regional differences in verbal harassment only for students of color, the findings were not significant. In contrast, there were no consistent patterns in students' religious-identification by region that might account for the differences in religious-based harassment. This finding may simply be a general reflection of religious tolerance in those parts of the country.

Comparisons by Locale

We were interested in whether students in our survey reported different experiences based on the type of community in which their schools were located—large cities and their suburbs, mid-size cities and their suburbs, small cities or towns and rural areas. Overall, there were only a few differences across the different locales (see Figures 45 to 47):⁴¹

- Overall, with regard to harassment and assault related to one's sexual orientation, students from small towns or rural areas reported the highest incidence. (See Figure 45.)
- With regard to harassment and assault related to one's gender expression, students from suburban areas reported, on average, the lowest incidence. Students from small town/rural areas were also higher on verbal harassment than students from urban areas. (See Figure 46.)

Figure 45. Experiences of Harassment and Assault Re: Sexual Orientation by Locale

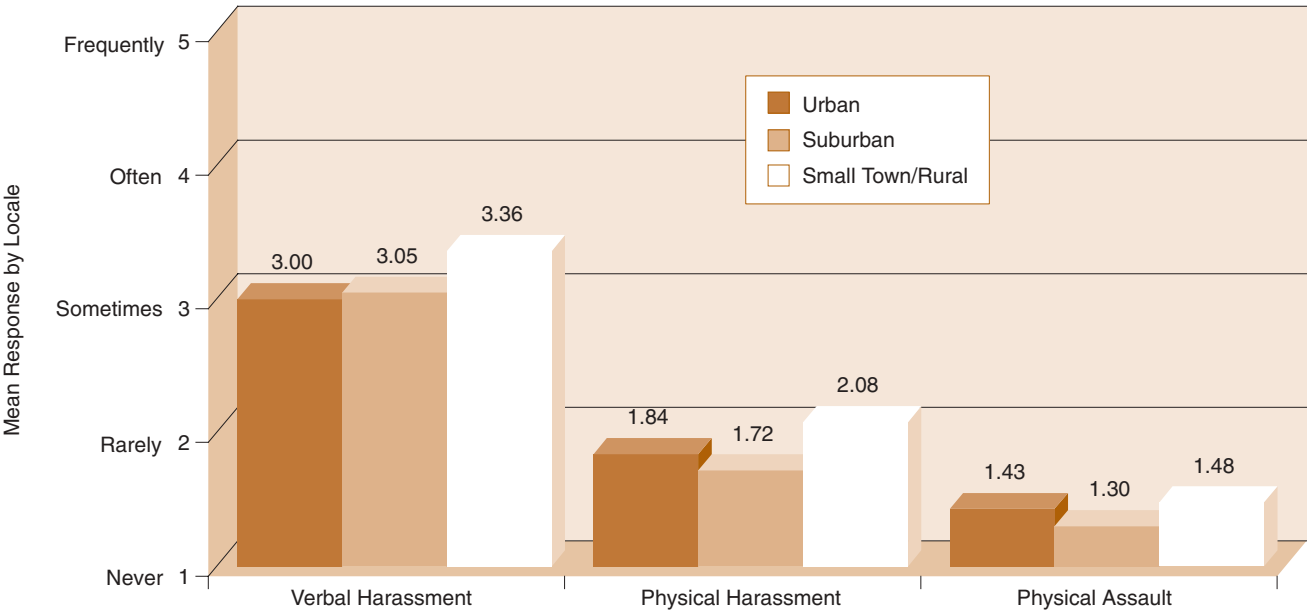


Figure 46. Experiences of Harassment and Assault Re: Gender Expression by Locale

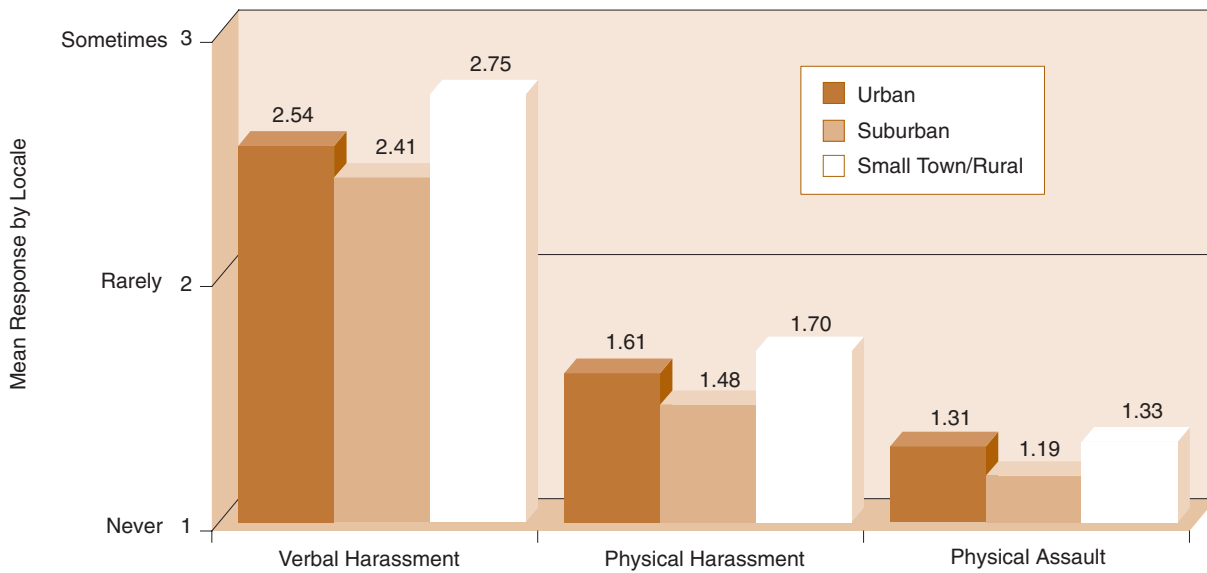
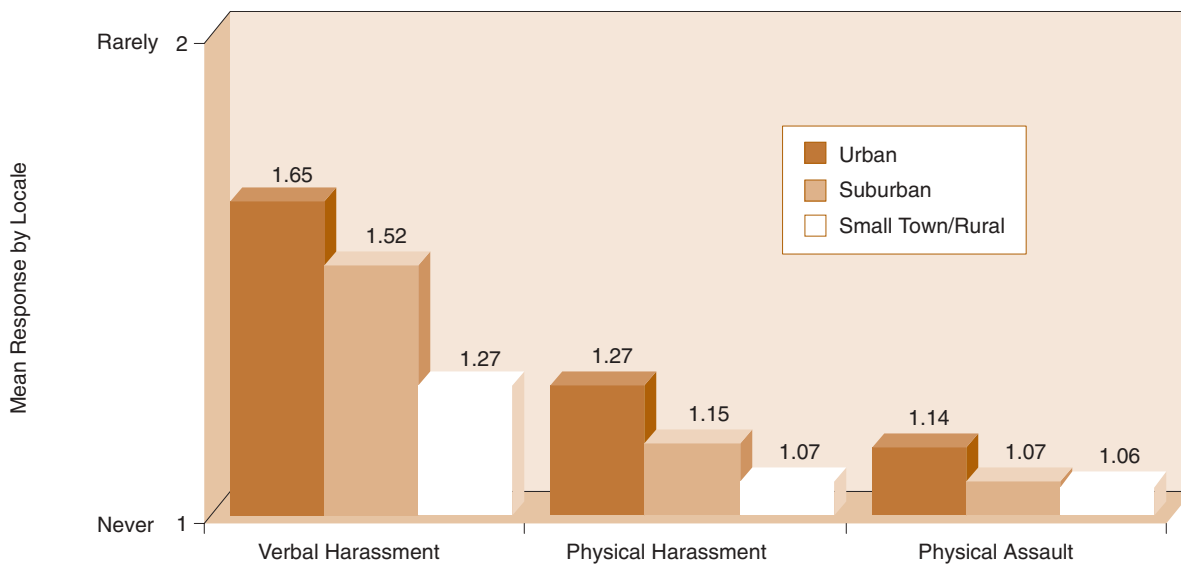


Figure 47. Experiences of Harassment and Assault Re: Race/Ethnicity by Locale



- With regard to race/ethnicity, students from urban areas reported the highest incidence of harassment or assault related to one's race or ethnicity. Also, students from suburban areas reported more frequent verbal harassment related to race/ethnicity than students from rural/small town areas. In part, these differences across locales may be due to the differing percentages of students of color across the locales. There were more students of color in the survey from urban areas compared to suburban and small town/rural areas (40.3%, 30.7% and 18.0%, respectively) and more students of color in suburban areas than in small town/rural areas. (See Figure 47.)

Notes

- 30 $\chi^2=26.28$, $df=5$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.13$.
- 31 $\chi^2=75.12$, $df=5$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.22$.
- 32 $\chi^2=28.89$, $df=5$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.13$.
- 33 To test differences across racial/ethnic groups, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all harassment and assault variables as dependent variables. Students in the "other race/ethnicity" group were not included in these analyses given the diverse range of groups included in that category. The multivariate results were significant – Pillai's Trace=.23; $F(110,7490)=3.24$, $p<.001$. Resulting univariate analyses were considered significant at a 99% significance level.
- 34 Native American students had an overall average of 2.59 and multiracial students had an overall average of 2.38 compared to 1.93 for white students, 1.84 for Latino/a students, 1.80 for Black/African American students and 1.65 for Asian/Pacific Islander students.
- 35 Statistical differences across gender groups: Sexual Orientation: $\chi^2=7.18$, $df=2$, $p<.05$; $\Phi=.07$; Gender: $\chi^2=122.71$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.27$; Gender Expression: $\chi^2=80.42$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.22$.
- 36 To test differences across gender groups, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted. The multivariate results were significant – Pillai's Trace=.221; $F(18,3292)=22.673$, $p<.001$. Resulting univariate analyses were considered significant at a 95% significance level.
- 37 To test differences across types of region, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all biased language variables included as dependent variables. The multivariate results were significant – Pillai's Trace=.036; $F(18,5037)=3.43$, $p<.001$. Resulting univariate analyses were considered significant at a 95% significance level.
- 38 The multivariate results were significant for region – Pillai's Trace=.034; $F(12,2562)=2.46$, $p<.01$.
- 39 Statistical differences across regions: $\chi^2=18.76$, $df=3$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.11$.
- 40 The multivariate results were significant – Pillai's Trace=.061; $F(54,4611)=1.78$, $p<.01$.
- 41 To test differences across types of locale, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all harassment and assault variables included as dependent variables. The multivariate results were significant – Pillai's Trace=.055; $F(36,3032)=2.40$, $p<.001$. Resulting univariate analyses were considered significant at a 95% significance level. There was a consistent pattern of differences in the harassment/assault variables related to sexual orientation, gender expression and race/ethnicity and only these three types are discussed here.



Intersection of Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation

LGBT students may have varying experiences with harassment, due in large part to the differing ways that they identify and the intersectionality of multiple identities—the complex ways in which multiple dimensions of identity (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, and culture) all intersect and shape our life experiences. While there may exist some commonalities with regard to the ways LGBT youth experience their sexual orientation and gender identity, there is no one universal experience. For example, in the context of our survey, lesbian and bisexual female students of color may experience harassment due to their sexual orientation, their gender, and/or their race or ethnicity. They may also experience harassment based on all of these characteristics. Transgender students may experience harassment due to their gender and gender expression, as well as experiencing homophobic harassment. For these reasons, it was important to examine the intersections of sexual orientation, gender, race and ethnicity with regard to harassment and assault in school.

Experiences of Students of Color

As illustrated in Table 11, nearly half (44.4%) of LGBT students of color had been verbally harassed in the past year due to their sexual orientation and race or ethnicity. Although the majority had not been physically harassed for either of these characteristics, almost a quarter (22.6%) of students of color experienced physical harassment due to their sexual orientation alone, and 13.2% due to both their sexual orientation and race/ethnicity. Most students of color had not been assaulted in the past year based on their sexual orientation or

Table 11. Intersection of Racism and Homophobia: Harassment and Assault Experiences of LGBT Students of Color

	Verbal Harassment (n=482)	Physical Harassment (n=486)	Physical Assault (n=487)
Neither Type of Harassment	15.1%	61.7%	80.7%
Sexual Orientation Only	35.7%	22.6%	11.7%
Race/Ethnicity Only	4.8%	2.5%	0.8%
Sexual Orientation and Race/Ethnicity	44.4%	13.2%	6.8%

Table 12. Intersection of Racism and Homophobia: Percent of LGBT Students of Color Missing School by Experiences with Harassment and Assault (n=480)

Harassed due to Race/Ethnicity	Harassed due to Sexual Orientation	
	No	Yes
No	12.3%	27.3%
Yes	17.4%	40.1%

race/ethnicity; however, among those who had experienced assault more reported being assaulted based on their sexual orientation alone (11.7%) than based on their race/ethnicity alone or because of both characteristics. Students of color who reported being verbally harassed because of both their sexual orientation and race/ethnicity were more likely than other students of color to also report missing an entire day of school because they felt unsafe. As Table 12 shows, 40.1% of students who had experienced both types of harassment reported missing at least one day of school in the past year. In contrast, the percent who reported missing school was lower among those who experienced one type of harassment only (17.4% of students who experienced racially/ethnically motivated harassment only; 27.3% of students who had been harassed for their sexual orientation only), or who had not experienced either type of harassment (12.3%).

Experiences of Lesbian and Bisexual Female Students

For lesbian and bisexual female students, verbal harassment due to gender and sexual orientation was a common experience—more than half of the lesbian and bisexual female students had been harassed based on their gender and sexual orientation (see Table 13). More than a quarter of these students (28.5%) had experienced harassment based on their sexual orientation alone and few reported harassment based only on their gender. Although most lesbian and bisexual students in our survey had not experienced physical harassment, those who had were more likely to have been harassed due to both their sexual orientation and gender (16.1%) or their sexual orientation alone (17.9%). As with physical harassment, the vast majority of these students

had not experienced physical assault in school and of the minority who had, they were more likely to report that it was due to both their gender and sexual orientation or their sexual orientation alone.

Experiences of Lesbian and Bisexual Female Students of Color

As illustrated in Table 14, over 80% of lesbian or bisexual female students of color reported some type of verbal harassment based on their gender, race/ethnicity or sexual orientation and the largest number (39%) reported being verbally harassed because of all three characteristics. Although the majority of these students reported no incidents of physical harassment or physical assault, about 10% reported physical harassment and about 5% reported physical assault because of all three characteristics.

Experiences of Transgender Students

As shown in Table 15, over half (56.4%) of transgender students reported verbal harassment based on all three personal characteristics—gender expression, gender and sexual orientation. Over half

Table 13. Intersection of Sexism and Homophobia: Harassment and Assault Experiences of Lesbian and Bisexual Female Students

	Verbal Harassment (n=778)	Physical Harassment (n=777)	Physical Assault (n=778)
Neither Type of Harassment	13.0%	61.9%	85.2%
Sexual Orientation Only	28.5%	17.9%	8.4%
Gender Only	4.2%	4.1%	0.4%
Sexual Orientation and Gender	54.2%	16.1%	6.0%

Table 14. Intersection of Racism, Sexism and Homophobia: Harassment and Assault Experiences of Lesbian and Bisexual Female Students of Color

	Verbal Harassment (n=205)	Physical Harassment (n=206)	Physical Assault (n=207)
None of the Three	15.6%	61.2%	84.5%
Race/Ethnicity Only	4.4%	1.0%	1.4%
Gender Only	2.9%	5.8%	0%
Sexual Orientation Only	16.1%	12.1%	6.3%
Race/Ethnicity and Gender	1.0%	1.0%	0%
Race/Ethnicity and Sexual Orientation	9.8%	2.4%	0.5%
Sexual Orientation and Gender	11.2%	6.8%	1.9%
Harassment Due to All Three	39.0%	9.7%	5.3%

(55.2%) of these students also reported some incident of physical harassment with over a quarter reporting this type of harassment because of all three characteristics. A third of the transgender students reported some experience with physical assault, which was much higher than for the other groups discussed in this section. Over 10% reported assault because of their gender expression, gender and sexual orientation.

Across the groups discussed here, it appears that students most often report being targeted for verbal harassment based on multiple characteristics (e.g., being gay and Latino) or perhaps on the intersections of these characteristics (e.g., being a gay Latino). With regard to the more extreme forms of victimization, physical harassment and assault, it appears that sexual orientation alone become more salient. For example, the largest number of students of color reported being verbally harassed because of both their sexual orientation and race/ethnicity, followed by sexual orientation only (44.4% and 35.7%, respectively). However, nearly twice as many students of color reported physical assault because of their sexual orientation alone than reported assault because of both race/ethnicity and sexual orientation (11.7% vs. 6.8%).

With regard to the intersections of sexual orientation, gender, gender expression and race/ethnicity, these results highlight the importance of understanding the diversity in experiences of LGBT students. When discussing the experiences of lesbian and bisexual female students, one must consider both experiences related to gender and to sexual orientation and, if they are students of color, their experiences related to race/ethnicity. When discussing the experiences of students of color, one must consider their experiences related to race/ethnicity and to sexual orientation. When discussing the experiences of transgender students, one must consider their experiences related to gender expression, gender and sexual orientation.

Table 15. Intersection of Gender Bias and Homophobia: Harassment and Assault Experiences of Transgender Students

	Verbal Harassment (n=94)	Physical Harassment (n=96)	Physical Assault (n=96)
None of the Three	7.4%	44.8%	66.7%
Gender Expression Only	8.5%	2.1%	4.2%
Gender Only	1.1%	0%	1.0%
Sexual Orientation Only	4.3%	3.1%	0%
Gender and Gender Expression	5.3%	1.0%	2.1%
Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression	16.0%	17.7%	11.5%
Sexual Orientation and Gender	1.1%	2.1%	2.1%
Harassment Due to All Three	56.4%	29.2%	12.5%

From our survey, we cannot know how LGBT youth make sense of the different types of harassment and assault that they experience with regard to the multiple dimensions of their identity. Perhaps, in certain circumstances, a youth can make a determination about the cause of an attack by the characteristics of the attack. The words used in an incident of verbal harassment, for example, may explain the underlying motivation of the perpetrator—racist language used in a verbal attack may lead the young person to determine that the experience was based on race or ethnicity, or homophobic language may lead the young person to determine that the experience was based on sexual orientation. For other youth, their reports of harassment and assault may be related to their own unique sense of their multiple identities—a Native American gay male youth, for example, may attribute all incidents of harassment directed toward him to his being both Native American and gay. Little is known in the social science literature about how LGBT individuals experience this multiplicity.⁴² More research is needed on LGBT youth that is both cognizant of the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, gender expression and sexual orientation and that explores how LGBT youth understand and experience these intersections of identity.

Notes

⁴² A full discussion of the intersections of race/ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation exceeds the scope of this report. For more information on these issues, there are several books that GLSEN recommends, including:

Kumashiro, K.K. (Ed.) (2001). *Troubling Intersections of Race and Sexuality: Queer Students of Color and Anti-Oppressive Education*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., and

Adams, M., Bloomenfeld, W.J., Castañeda, R., Hackman, H.W., Peters, M. & Zúñiga, X. (Eds.) (2001). *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Anti-Semitism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Ableism, and Classism*. New York: Routledge.



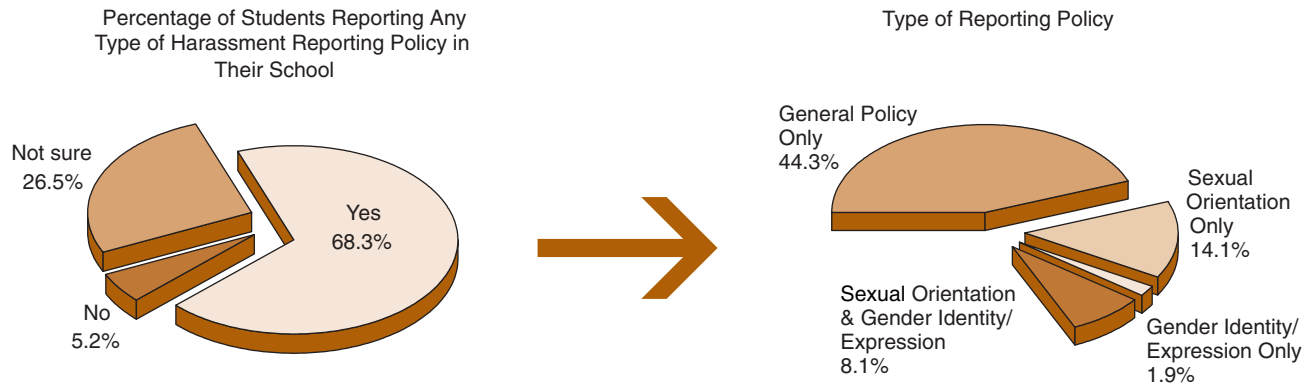
LGBT Resources and Supports in School

Another dimension of school climate for LGBT students is the availability of positive resources about LGBT-related issues and of supportive faculty or staff. Thus, we asked the students in our survey about certain school supports: a school policy or procedures for reporting incidents of harassment or assault; teachers or school staff who are supportive of LGBT students; student clubs addressing LGBT student issues (such as a GSA), and the inclusion of LGBT people, history or events in classroom curricula or discussions.

School Policies for Reporting Harassment and Assault

Having a policy or procedure for reporting incidents of harassment in school is an important tool for making schools safer for all students. When such policies or procedures exist and are enforced, schools send a message to the student population that victimizing behaviors will not be tolerated. Students were asked about the presence of school policies for reporting incidents of in-school harassment or assault and whether their policy provided explicit protection based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression. As shown in Figure 48, the majority of students (68.3%) reported that their school had a policy for reporting such events. However, among those who attended a school with a reporting policy, far fewer students said that their school's policy specifically mentioned sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. Thus, less than a quarter (22.2%) of all respondents attended a school with a policy that specifically mentioned sexual orientation, and only a tenth attended a school with a policy that mentioned gender identity or expression.

Figure 48. Prevalence and Type of Safe School Policy



It is important to note that more than a quarter (26.5%) of students did not know whether their school had a policy. It is possible that their lack of knowledge is a result of their school not having such a policy. If this were the case, the percentage of LGBT students who do not have even a general school policy may be much larger than 5%. It is equally possible that their schools do have some type of protective policy but the students were unaware or uninformed about it. In that a school policy on harassment can be effective only if the entire school community is informed of its existence, a large number of uninformed students reflects on the schools' poor implementation of a safe school policy.

Figure 49. Number of Teachers or Other School Staff Who Were Supportive of LGBT Students
(n=1672)

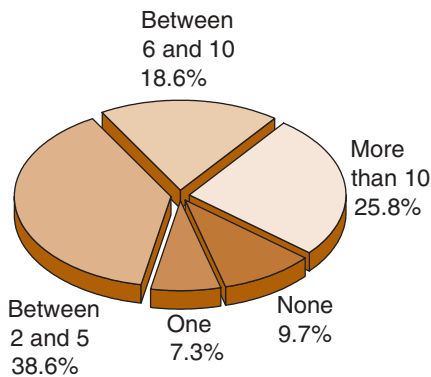
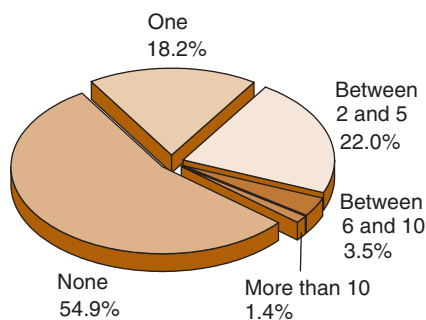


Figure 50. Number of Openly LGBT Teachers or Other School Staff
(n=1700)



Supportive School Personnel

Having access to teachers, principals and other school staff who are supportive of their needs and issues is another important resource for LGBT students. Nine out of ten students in the 2005 survey knew of at least one teacher or other school staff person who was supportive of LGBT students (see Figure 49). The presence of LGBT school personnel who are "out" or open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity may also be a source of support. More than half (54.9%) of students reported that there were no teachers or other school staff at their school who were openly lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender (see Figure 50).

Students were also asked about their level of comfort speaking one-on-one with school personnel about LGBT issues. Students were more comfortable talking about LGBT issues with a teacher or school counselor or psychologist than other types of school personnel. As shown in Figure 51, more than half of the students said they would be somewhat or very comfortable talking with their teacher or school counselor/school psychologist (58.3% and 58.2%, respectively). Fewer reported that they would feel comfortable discussing LGBT issues with a principal, school nurse or school librarian. Students were least likely to feel comfortable talking with an athletic coach, with only a quarter reporting that they would feel somewhat or very comfortable discussing LGBT issues with this type of staff.⁴³

Figure 51. Comfort Talking with School Personnel About LGBT Issues
(percent of students reporting that they would be "Somewhat Comfortable" or "Very Comfortable")

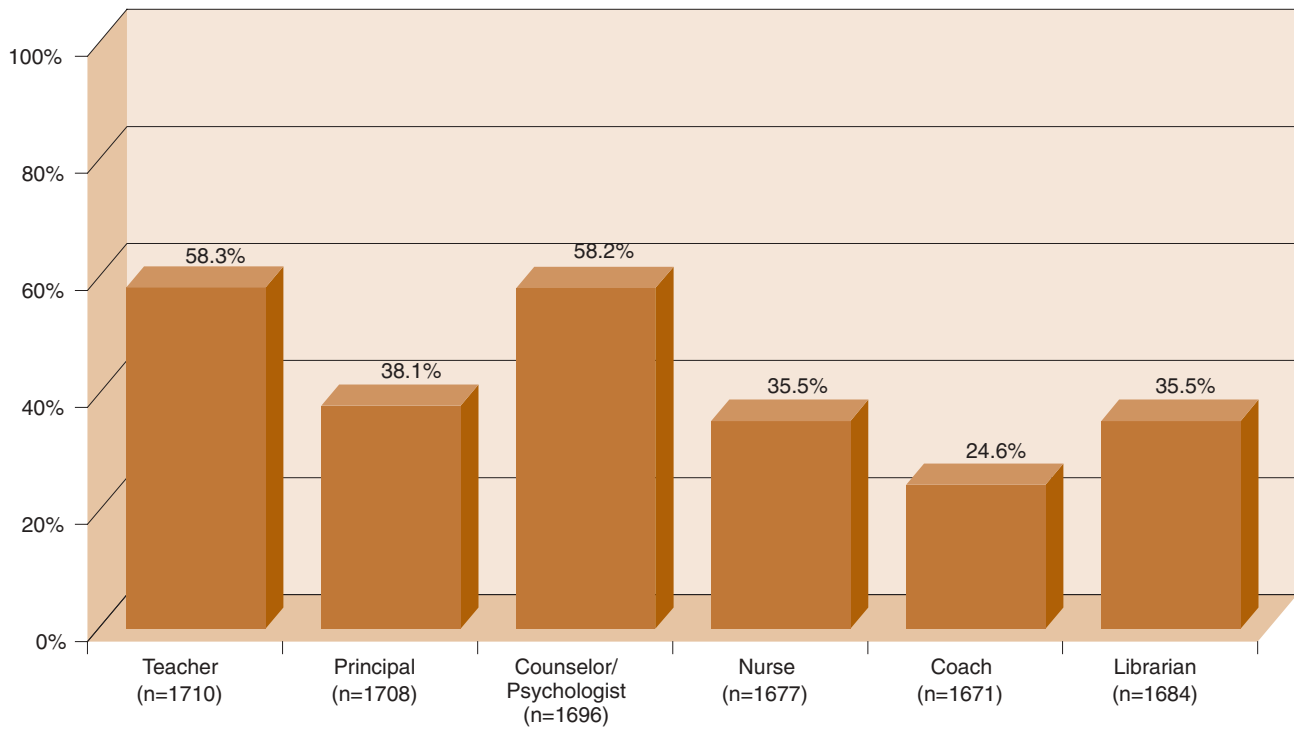
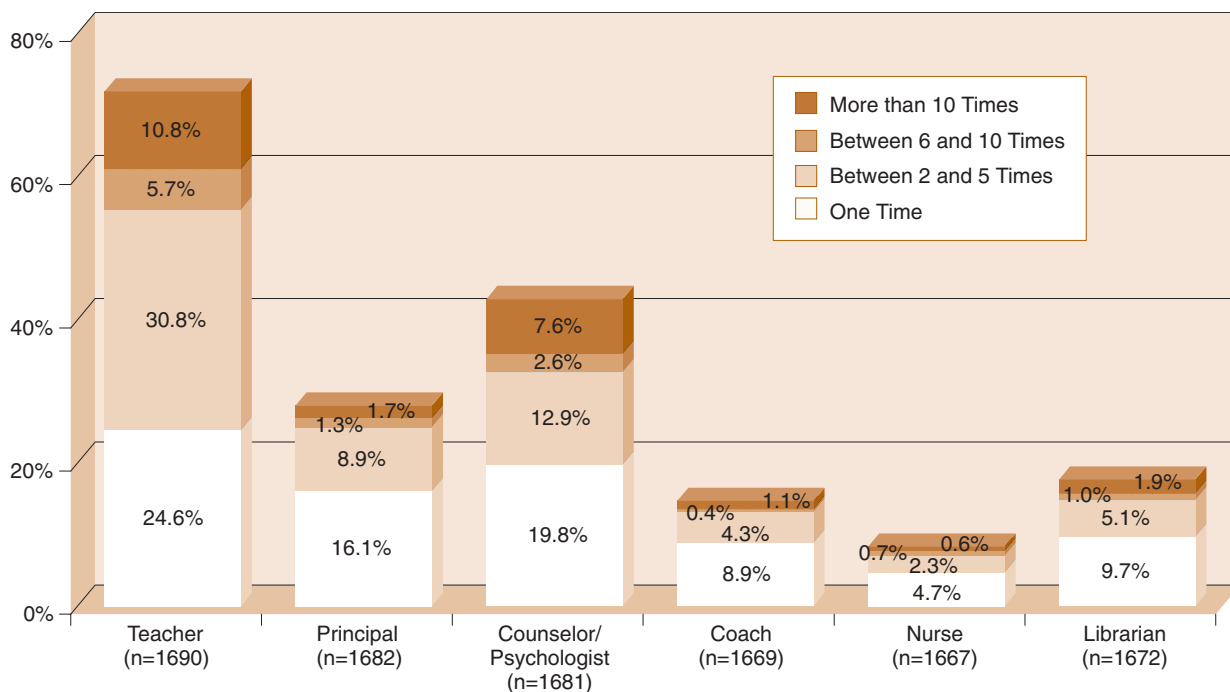


Figure 52. Frequency of Students Speaking with School Personnel About LGBT Issues



In addition to asking students how comfortable they would be talking about LGBT issues with school personnel, we asked them how often they had actually spoken to faculty or staff about LGBT issues. As Figure 52 shows, the majority of students reported that they had spoken to teachers—71.9% reported that they had talked with a teacher at least once in the past school year about LGBT issues. Students were also inclined to speak with a school counselor or psychologist about such issues—42.9% had spoken with a school counselor/psychologist at least once. Fewer reported that they had discussed LGBT issues with a principal or school librarian. Students reported that they had talked about LGBT issues least often with their school nurse and an athletic coach.⁴⁴

Student Clubs

For many LGBT students and their student allies, student clubs that address LGBT student issues, such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), may offer critical support. About half (47.2%) of students reported that their school had this type of student club (see Figure 53). Of those students who had a GSA in their school, two-thirds (66.3%) of students who participated in their school's GSA attended meetings often or frequently (see Figure 54), and over half (52.7%) had participated as a leader or officer. It is important to note that nearly a quarter of students who had a GSA in their school never or rarely attended meetings. Although we did not ask these students why they did not attend meetings, it may be that these students did not feel comfortable attending GSA meetings and, thus, would be yet another segment of the LGBT student population that is isolated from possible school supports. In fact, in the 2005 survey, we found that GSA attendance was related to how “out” the students were. As shown in Figure 55, half of the students who were not “out” at all in school attended their GSA meetings compared to nearly 90% of students who were “out” to everyone.⁴⁵

Having a principal that is supportive of a GSA in school may be another important indicator of school climate for LGBT students. As shown in Figure 56, while half of students whose schools had GSAs believed that their school principal was at least somewhat supportive of the GSA, many believed that their principal was unsupportive (18.3%), or was neutral (31.6%). Having a principal show support of a school's GSA may be one indicator to LGBT students that he or she is supportive of LGBT students. There was a relationship between students' reports of principal support of the GSA and their comfort in talking to the principal about LGBT issues—students reported higher levels of comfort talking with their principal when they believed their principal was more supportive of the school club.⁴⁶

Figure 53. LGBT-Related Resources in School

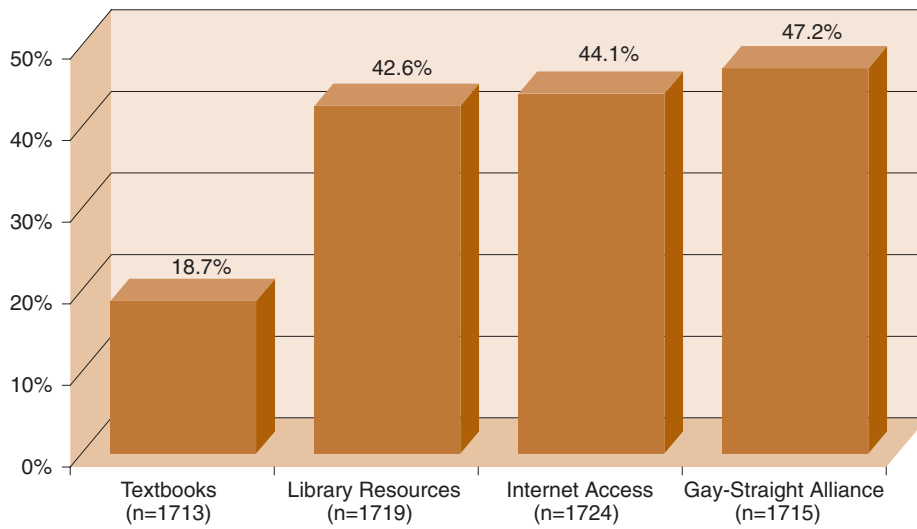


Figure 54. Frequency of Attending Gay-Straight Alliance Meetings
(n=804)

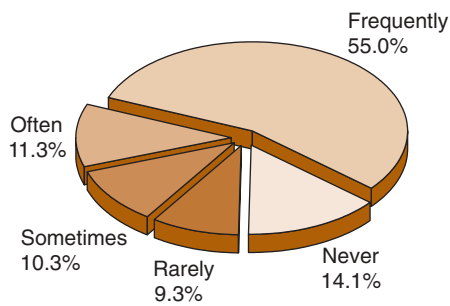


Figure 55. Relationship Between Being "Out" and Attending GSA Meetings

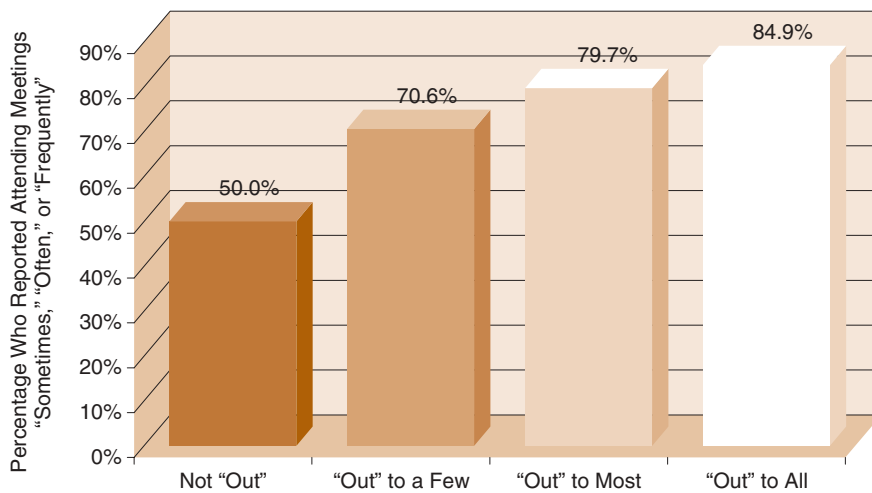
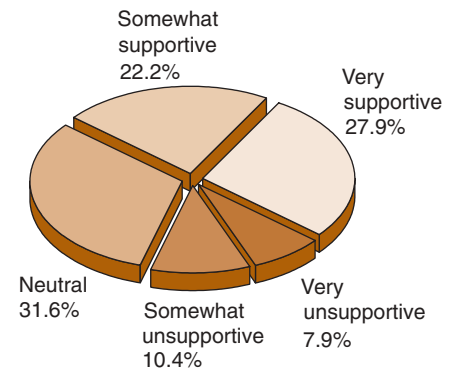


Figure 56. Principal's Level of Support for Gay-Straight Alliance
(n=797)



Resources and Curricula

For many students, LGBT-related resources were not available in their school. As shown in Figure 53, less than half reported that they could find information about LGBT people, history or events in their school library (42.6%) or by using the school Internet (44.1%). Only about a fifth (18.7%) reported that LGBT-related topics were included in their textbooks.

When asked whether they had been taught about LGBT people, history or events in school, a vast majority (81.7%) of students said these topics were not taught in any of their classes (see Figure 57). Among students who had been taught LGBT-related topics in class,

Figure 57. LGBT-Related Topics in the Classroom

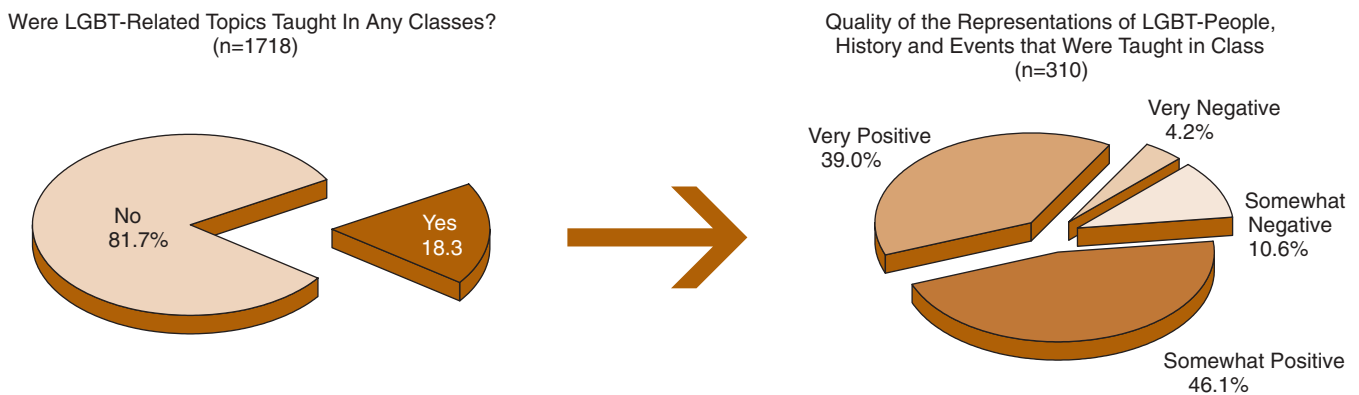
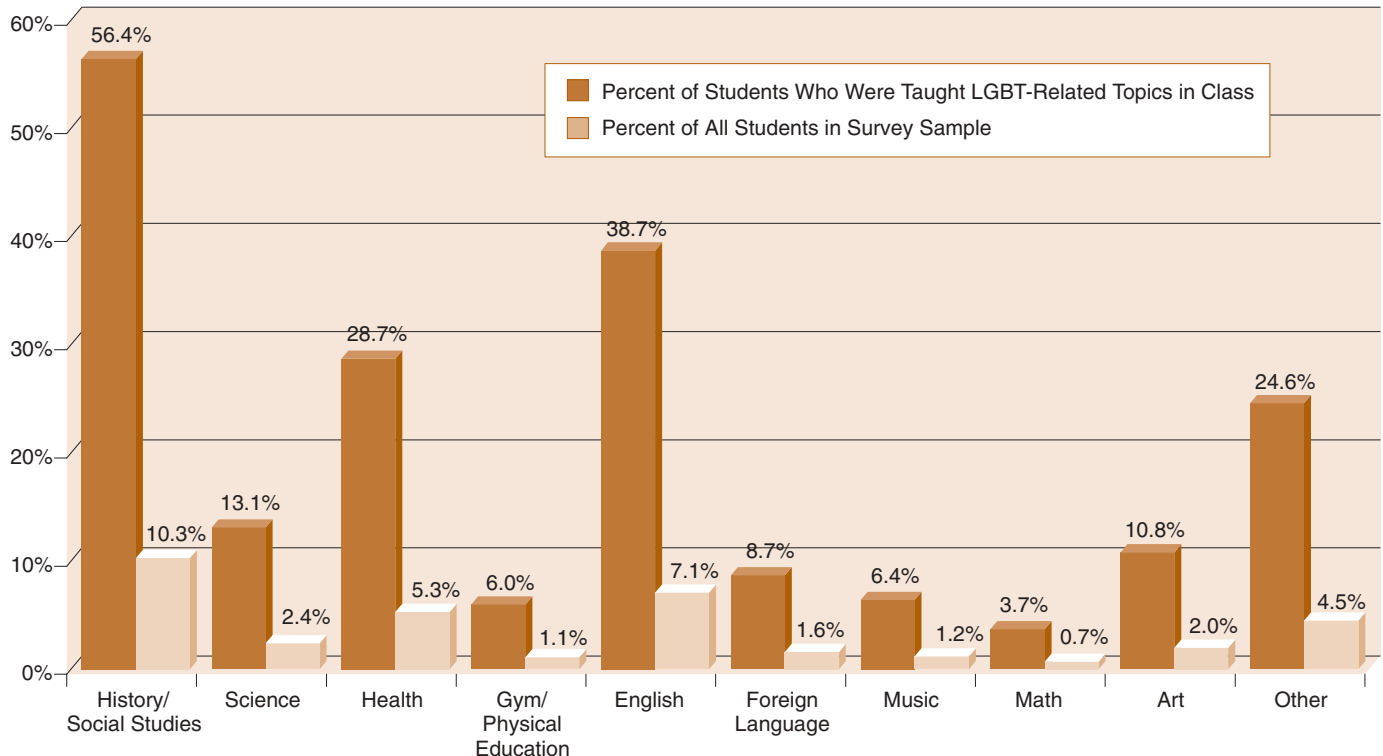


Figure 58. Classes in Which LGBT-Related Topics Were Taught



History/Social Studies, English and Health were the classes most often mentioned as being inclusive of LGBT-related topics (see Figure 58). Although less common, students reported that LGBT issues had been taught in other types of classes, such as Religion, Psychology or Life Skills. As shown in Figure 59, among students who had been taught about LGBT-related topics in class, a majority said that the representations of LGBT people, history or events were somewhat or very positive. This means, however, that less than a fifth (15.6%) of all students in our survey reported that positive representations of LGBT people, history, and events were included in their classroom activities.

In the 2005 survey, we wanted to understand better what LGBT students are being taught in school health classes regarding sexual orientation. Given that discussions about sexuality or sexual behavior are common in health education classes, they might be likely venues for the discussion of sexual orientation. Thus, we asked students an additional question specifically about their health education classes to discern whether the topic of sexual orientation was ever included in discussion about dating, family relationships or sex education:

- The majority of students reported that discussions of sexual orientation were not included in their health curricula (69.4%).
- About a tenth of students reported that sexual orientation was discussed in a negative manner (11.8%).
- Thus, less than a fifth of all students (18.8%) said that representations of lesbian, gay and bisexual people were positive in their health education classes.

Comparison of School Resources and Supports by Locale and Region

Given the differences by locale and geographic region regarding the experiences of harassment and assault, it is also important to examine whether there were any differences with respect to school-based resources. Some significant differences were found by locale in the availability of LGBT-related resources in school (see Figures 60 to 62):

- Students in small town/rural areas were much less likely to report having teachers in their school who were supportive of LGBT students. As shown in Figure 60, about a third (32.1%) of students in small town/rural areas reported having a high level of support compared to nearly half of students from suburban areas (49.6%) and about 40% of students from urban areas (42.3%).⁴⁷
- Students from small town/rural areas were much less likely to report having a GSA and positive representation of LGBT people and events in the curriculum (see Figure 61).⁴⁸
- Students from small/town rural areas were less likely to report having a comprehensive safety policy in their schools and more likely to have a generic policy (without specific enumerated categories) than students in other areas (see Figure 62).⁴⁹

Figure 59. The Quality of Representations of LGBT-Related Topics in the Classroom

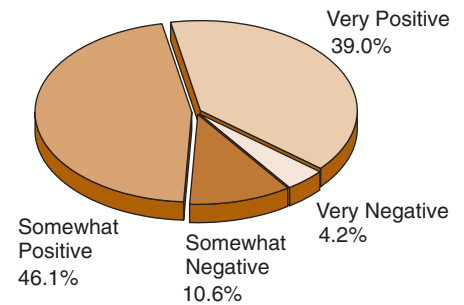


Figure 60. Number of Teachers Supportive of LGBT Students by Locale

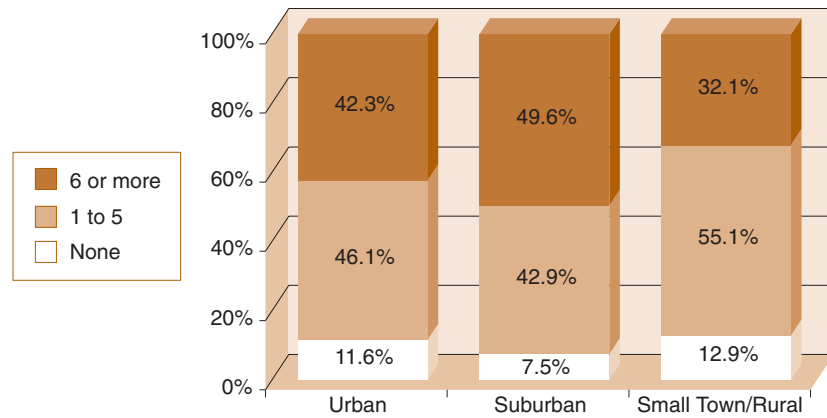


Figure 61. LGBT-Related Resources by Locale

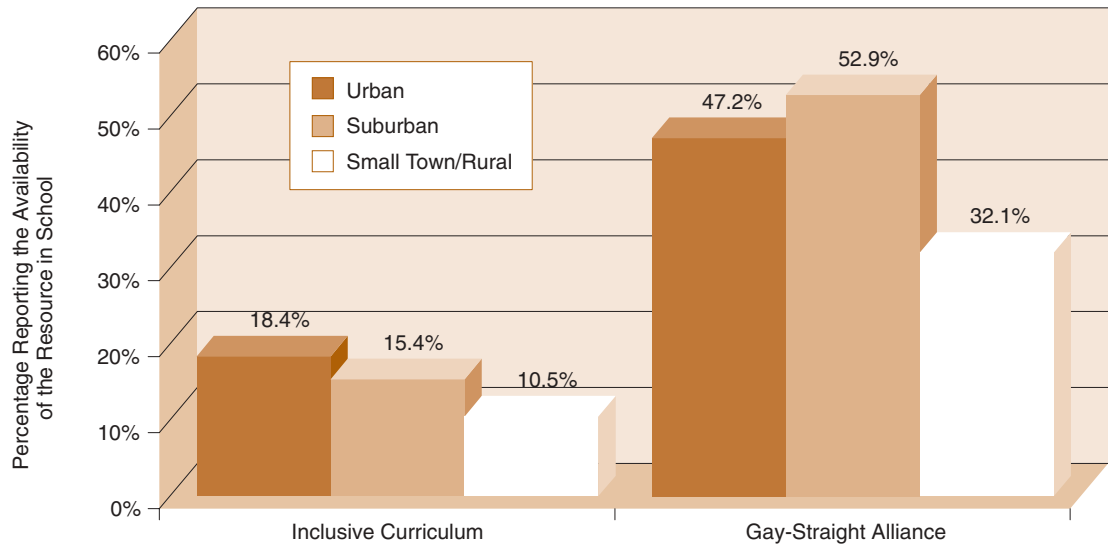


Figure 62. Type of Safe School Policy by Locale

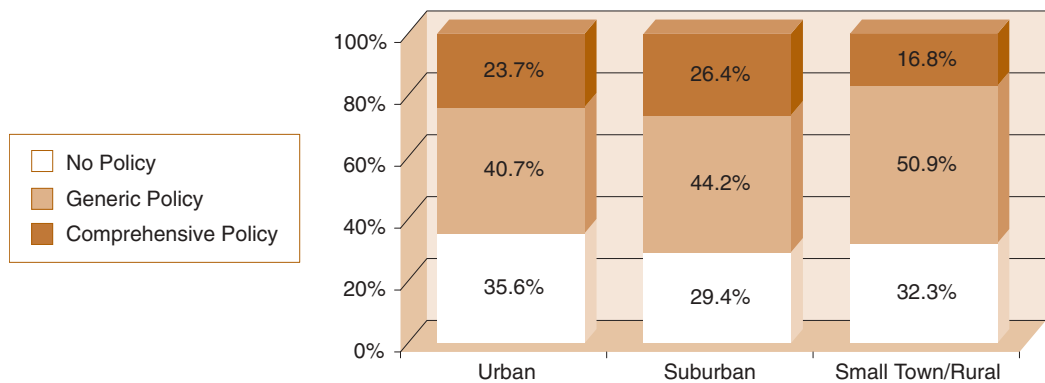
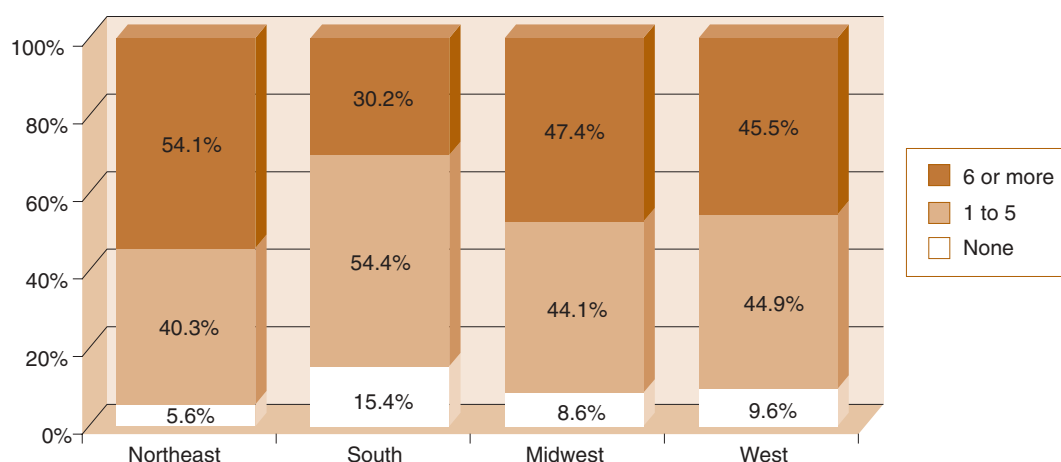


Figure 63. Number of Teachers Supportive of LGBT Students by Region



There were also several differences across geographical regions regarding school resources and supports. For the most part, students in the South reported fewer LGBT school-based supports than students from other regions:

- Only about a third of students in the South reported having a high number of supportive faculty/staff in their school (30.2%) compared to about half the students in the other regions (see Figure 63).⁵⁰
- Students from the South were also least likely to report having LGBT resources in their school library and having access to LGBT community resources from the school Internet (see Figure 64).⁵¹
- Students from the South were least likely to report having a GSA in their schools. Students from the Midwest were also lower on reporting GSAs in their schools than students in the Northeast and the West. (See also Figure 64).⁵²
- Students from the South and Midwest were also less likely to report having positive representations of LGBT people or events in the school curriculum than students in the Northeast and West. (See also Figure 64).⁵³
- Students from the South were least likely to report having a comprehensive protective school policy about bullying and harassment in their schools, followed by students in the Midwest (see Figure 65).⁵⁴

Figure 64. LGBT-Related Resources by Region

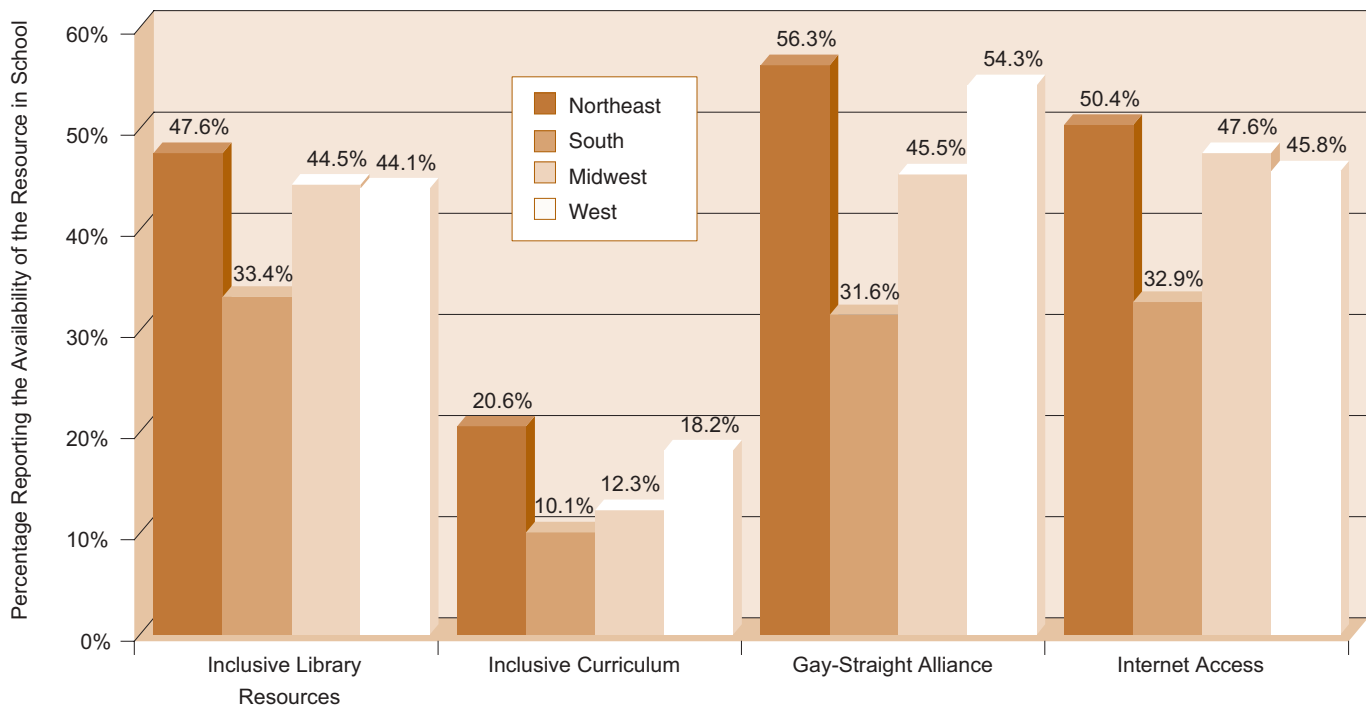
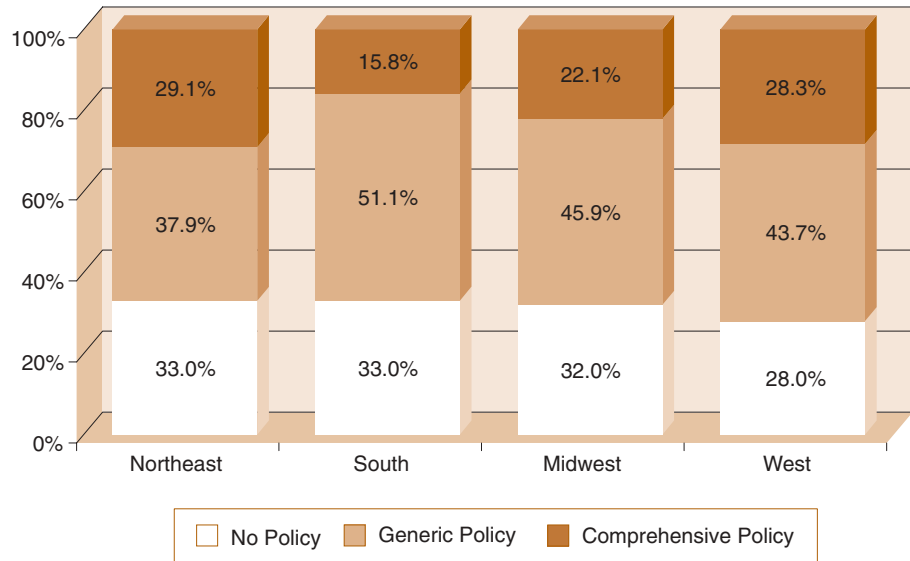


Figure 65. Type of Safe School Policy by Region



Comparison of LGBT School Resources Among GLSEN's 2001, 2003 and 2005 Surveys

GLSEN works to improve school climate and resources for LGBT students in our nation's schools by educating educators about LGBT issues, providing inclusive curricular resources, working with educational policy makers and supporting students to change their own school environments. Therefore, it is important to examine whether there have been changes in resources over time.

In our 2003 report, we found that there were gains from 2001 to 2003 in the number of GSAs and in the number of students who had faculty/staff at school who were supportive of LGBT students (Kosciw, 2004). As shown in Figure 66, there was a small decrease from 2003 to 2005 in the percentage of students who reported having a GSA in their school (54.2% to 47.2%). However, the percentage of students in 2005 who reported having a GSA was still vastly higher than that in 2001. Similarly, with regard to supportive teachers, there was a small decrease from 2003 to 2005 in the percentage of students who reported having at least one supportive teacher, but the 2005 percentage remained higher than that from 2001.⁵⁵

In our 2003 report, we found that the percentage of students who reported having Internet access to LGBT community resources and LGBT resources in their libraries decreased from 2001. There were no significant changes between 2003 and 2005 (see also Figure 66). Thus, students in 2005 are still reporting deficits in these resources from 2001 levels.⁵⁶

From 2001 to 2003, we saw an increase in the percentage of students who were comfortable talking to teachers, principals and/or school counselors about LGBT issues. In 2005, there was a decrease in the percentage of students who reported feeling comfortable talking with their teachers, but the percentage was still higher than that in 2001 (see Figure 67).⁵⁷ However, the percentage of students who felt comfortable speaking with their principals and school counselors fell to 2001 levels (see also Figure 67). Thus, it appears that gains made from 2001 to 2003 did not hold in 2005.

Notes

43 Percentages are shown for descriptive purposes. Differences in mean comfort levels talking to the various types of school personnel was tested with a repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance with the six school personnel variables as dependent variables. The multivariate results were significant – Pillai's Trace=.49; $F(5,1628)=312.16$, $p<.001$. Resulting paired t-test analyses were considered significant at a 99% significance level.

44 Percentages are shown for descriptive purposes. Differences in the frequency of speaking to the various types of school personnel was tested with a repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with the same six school personnel variables as dependent variables. The multivariate results were significant – Pillai's Trace=.55; $F(5,1643)=393.41$, $p<.001$. Resulting paired t-test analyses were considered significant at a 99% significance level.

45 $\chi^2=41.12$, $df=3$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.23$.

46 Pearson $r=.45$, $p<.001$.

47 $\chi^2=31.77$, $df=4$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.14$.

48 Curriculum: $\chi^2=103.34$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.17$. GSA: $\chi^2=38.15$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.15$.

49 $\chi^2=16.45$, $df=4$, $p<.01$; $\Phi=.10$.

50 $\chi^2=62.86$, $df=6$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.20$.

51 Library: $\chi^2=20.94$, $df=3$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.11$. Internet: $\chi^2=32.12$, $df=3$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.14$.

52 $\chi^2=65.83$, $df=3$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.20$.

53 $\chi^2=24.55$, $df=3$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.12$.

54 $\chi^2=32.70$, $df=6$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.14$.

55 Statistical differences across all three years: GSA: $\chi^2=103.34$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.17$. Supportive Teachers: $\chi^2=19.15$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.08$.

56 Differences between 2003 and 2005 were not statistically significant: Internet: $\chi^2=1.61$; Library Resources: $\chi^2=2.388$.

57 Differences between 2003 and 2005: Teachers: $\chi^2=4.84$, $df=2$, $p<.05$; $\Phi=-.04$. Principals: $\chi^2=13.85$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=-.07$. Counselors: $\chi^2=11.71$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=-.07$.

Figure 66. Comparison of 2001, 2003 and 2005 NSCS: LGBT-Related Resources in School

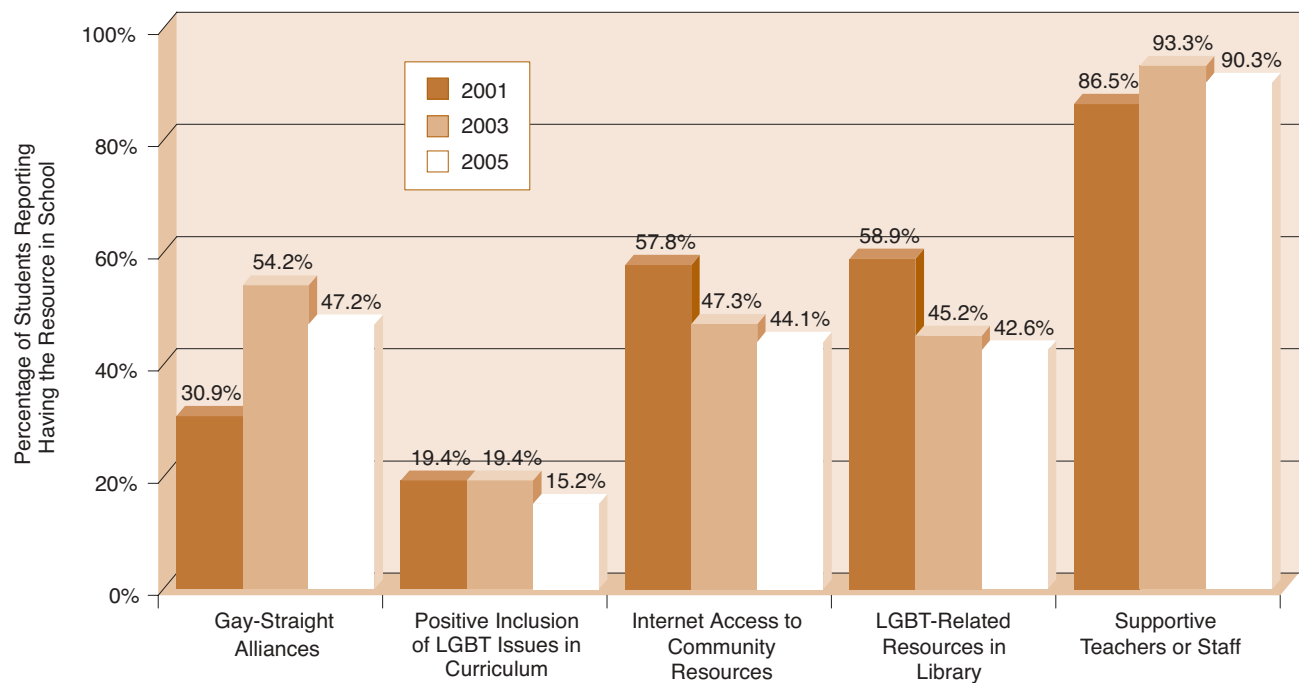
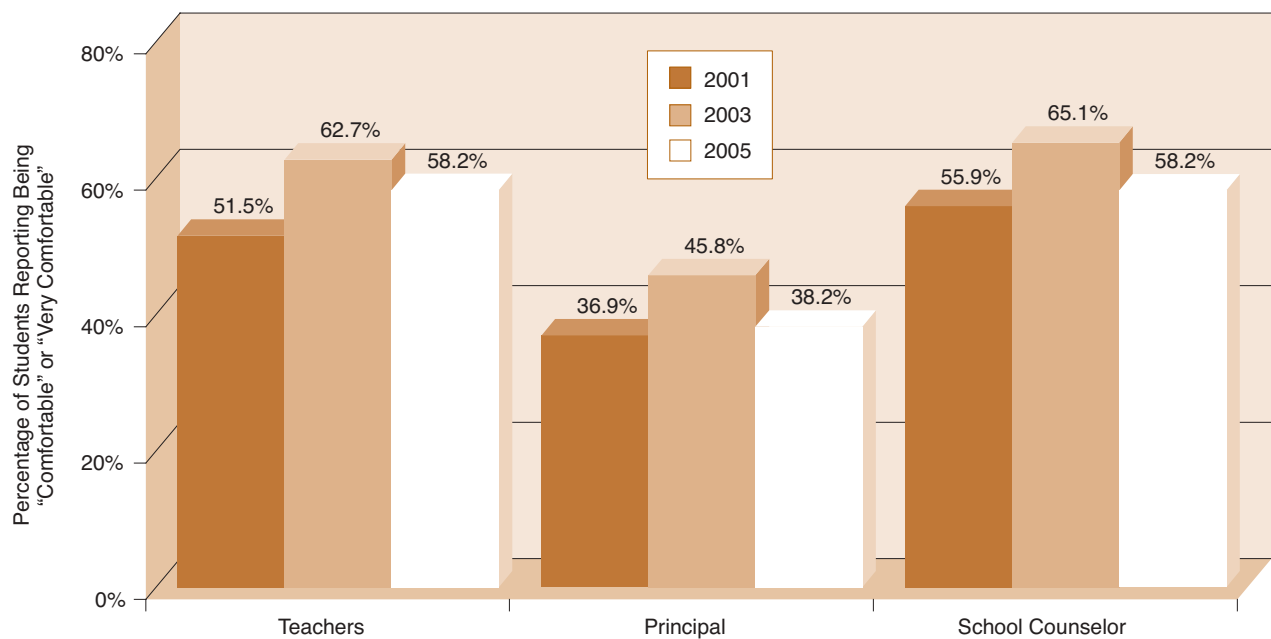


Figure 67. Comparison of 2001, 2003 and 2005 NSCS: Comfort Discussing LGBT Issues with Faculty/School Staff





Utility of School Resources and Supports

In addition to documenting whether or not schools have institutional supports for LGBT students, such as supportive faculty, inclusionary curricula, or Gay-Straight Alliances, it is also important to examine how such institutional supports may benefit LGBT students. Given that GLSEN's National School Climate Survey was cross-sectional in design, we cannot make definitive statements about the effectiveness of these supports. We can examine, however, whether there were relationships between students' reports on the availability of institutional supports and access to education (whether or not they miss school for safety reasons), academic achievement and educational aspirations.

Supportive Educators

In general, having a supportive teacher can have a positive influence on one's education for all types of students. For LGBT students, having a supportive teacher or school staff member may benefit one's educational experience by helping to create a safer learning environment. As shown in Figure 68, students with higher numbers of supportive faculty/staff members in their school were less likely to report that they felt unsafe in their school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression.⁵⁸ For example, whereas over two-thirds of students with no supportive faculty/staff reported feeling unsafe in their school because of their sexual orientation, about half (56.1%) of students with many supportive educators reported feeling unsafe for that reason. With regards to feeling unsafe, there were no significant differences between those students with no supportive teachers and those with only a few. Given the pervasiveness of anti-LGBT language and

harassment in school, it is possible that having only a few supportive teachers may not be enough to affect the entire school climate.

A greater number of supportive teachers was related to fewer reports of missing days of school because of feeling unsafe. As shown in Figure 69, nearly 40% of students with no supportive faculty/staff reported missing at least one day of school in the past month.⁵⁹ However, this percentage drops as the number of supportive faculty/staff increases. Students who report having many faculty/staff members in their school (6 or more) were half as likely to miss school than those with no supportive teachers (21.5% vs. 38.3%).

Perhaps as a result of facilitating a safer school climate, having supportive faculty/staff was also related to a greater sense of school belonging among LGBT students in the survey. As shown in Figure 70, there is a positive relationship between the number of supportive faculty/staff and sense of school belonging.⁶⁰ Students with only a few supportive faculty/staff members reported a greater sense of belonging than those with none and those with many supportive faculty/staff members had a greater sense of belonging than both those with a few and those with none.

Given that having supportive faculty/staff was related to students' access to education (fewer missed days of school and a lower likelihood of feeling unsafe), it is perhaps not surprising that the number of faculty/staff supportive of LGBT students was related to positive educational indicators. As shown in Figure 71, as the number of supportive faculty/staff increase, students' reported grade point average also increased.⁶¹ In fact, those students who had many supportive faculty/staff in their school had GPAs about a half a grade higher than those with no supportive faculty/staff (2.8 vs. 3.2). Similarly, increased numbers of supportive faculty/staff was associated with a lower likelihood of not planning on pursuing post-secondary education. As shown in Figure 72, about 20% of students with no supportive faculty/staff reported that they did not plan on going to college compared to 12.2% of students with a few and 7.1% of those with many supportive faculty/staff.⁶²

As previously discussed, increased harassment because of one's sexual orientation in school is related to negative educational outcomes, such as poorer grades, missing school, and lowered educational aspirations. Yet we also found that having a supportive teacher may help create a safer school environment for LGBT students. Our analyses of the 2005 data show that teachers may not only have a positive effect on the student's school experience but that their support may ameliorate the negative effects of a hostile climate. Figure 73 shows the relationship between missing school because of feeling unsafe and levels of verbal harassment related to one's sexual orientation while considering the number of supportive faculty/staff in school.⁶³ In general, students who report higher levels of harassment are more likely to miss entire days of school. However, this negative effect appears to be less strong for those students who have at least

one teacher who is supportive of LGBT students. At low levels of harassment, there are few differences among those students with no supportive teacher, a few supportive teachers and many supportive teachers (21.5%, 22.4% and 13.8%, respectively). Nevertheless, those students who reported the highest number of supportive teachers were less likely to have missed any school relative to the other two groups. In contrast, at high levels of harassment, students without a supportive teacher are much more likely to miss school than those students who reported having a few or many supportive teachers (60.9% vs. 48.6% and 40.1%, respectively). Also, those students who reported having many supportive teachers were less likely to miss school than those with only a few (48.6% vs. 40.1%). Thus, particularly for the most at-risk students—those who are frequently harassed in school—having supportive teachers may offset the negative effects of the harassment.

Figure 68. Feeling Unsafe in School and Number of Supportive Faculty/Staff

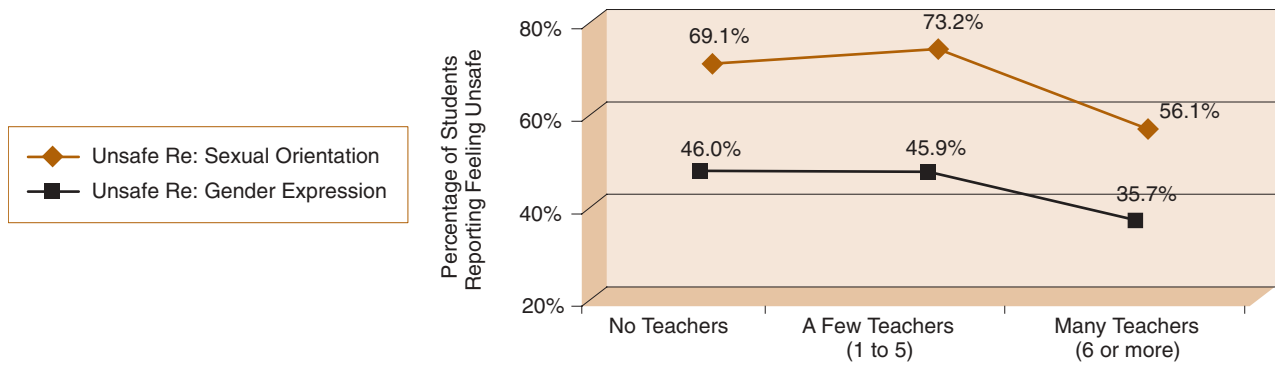


Figure 69. Missing School for Safety Reasons and Having Supportive Educators

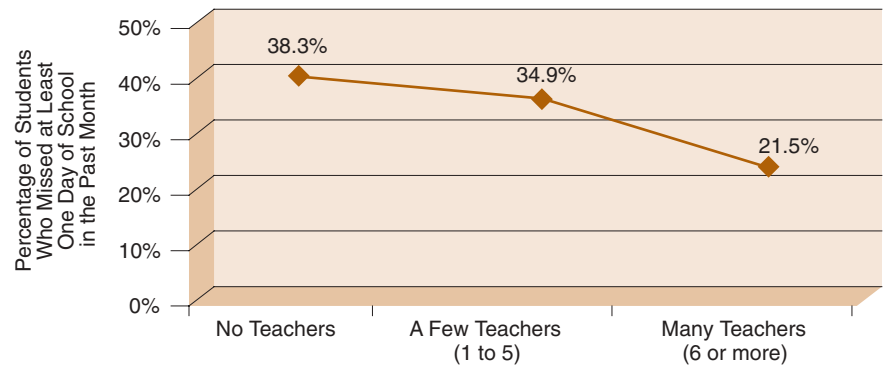


Figure 70. School Belonging and Having Supportive Educators

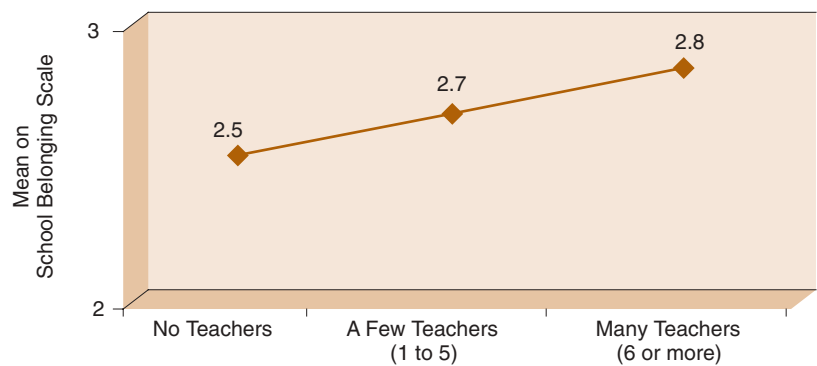


Figure 71. Student Achievement and Supportive Educators

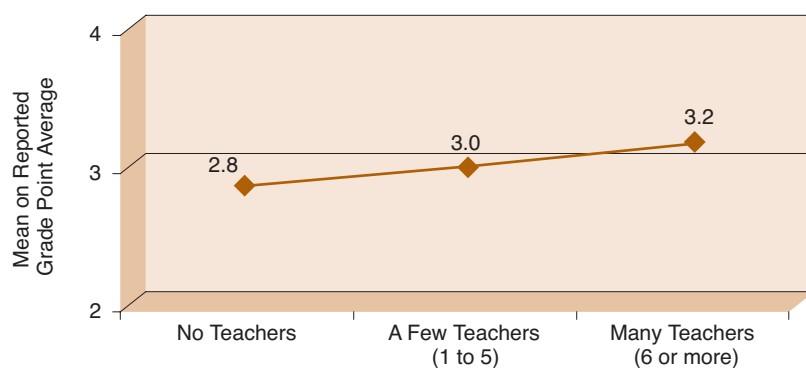


Figure 72. Students Not Planning on College and Number of Supportive Faculty/Staff

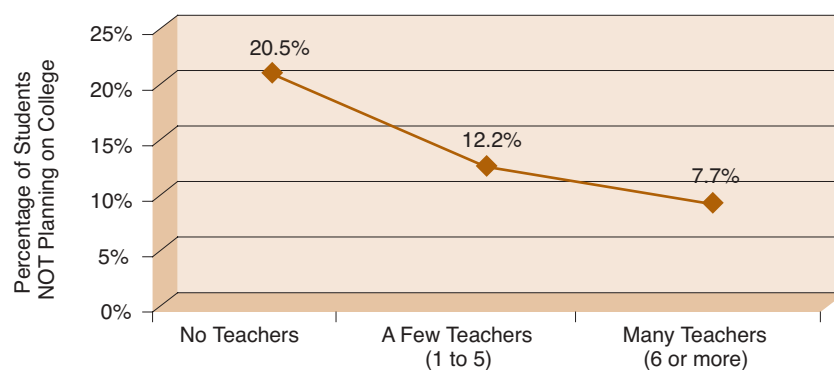
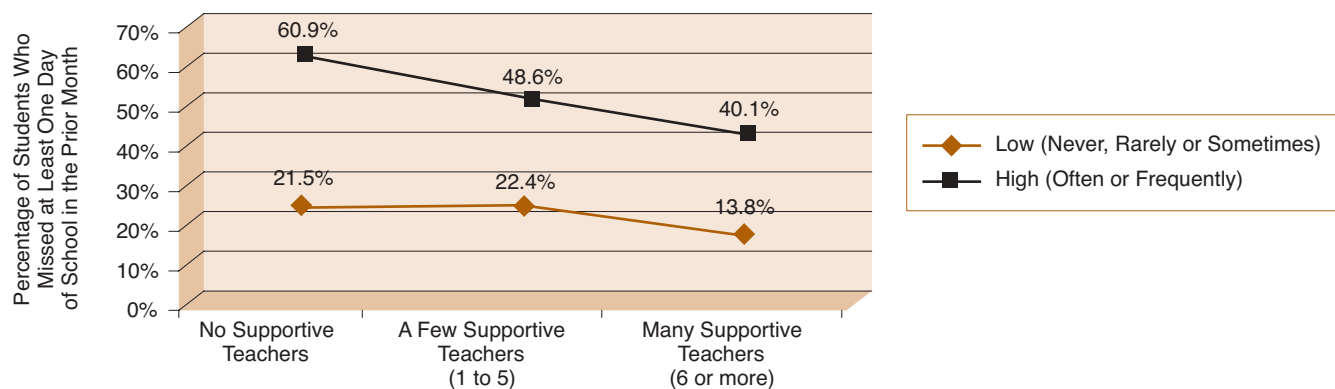


Figure 73. Buffering Effects of Having Supportive Teachers: Verbal Harassment re: Sexual Orientation and Missing School for Safety Reasons



Gay-Straight Alliances

GSAs have historically been targets of attempts to ban them from schools. Even with federal protection allowing GSAs to exist alongside other student clubs, opponents have continued attempts to restrict the existence of or access to these clubs. Thus, it is important to demonstrate that having a GSA in one's school has positive educational benefits for LGBT students and their allies:

- There were small but significant relationships between having a GSA and feeling of safety in school because of one's sexual orientation or gender expression. Students whose school had a GSA were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation (60.8%) and their gender expression (38.2%) compared to those students without GSAs (67.5% and 43.4%, respectively).⁶⁴
- Students whose school had a GSA were less likely to miss school because they felt unsafe compared to other students. About a third of students whose school has no GSA missed at least one day of school in the past month (32.0%) compared to a quarter of students whose school had a GSA (25.5%).⁶⁵
- Students whose school had a GSA reported higher levels of school belonging than students whose school did not (2.78 vs. 2.67).⁶⁶

Inclusive Curriculum

Many experts in multicultural education believe that an inclusive curriculum promotes equity for all, regardless of culture, race/ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, in that it enables the individual to believe in one's own intrinsic worth and in one's own culture. Among the LGBT students in our study, attending a school that has positive representations of LGBT people and events as part of the curriculum was related to a more positive school experience:

- Students who reported positive representations of LGBT issues in their curriculum were much less likely to miss school because of feeling unsafe than other students (17.1% vs. 31.1%).⁶⁷
- Students who reported that their curriculum included positive LGBT representations also had a greater sense of belonging in their school than other students, with a higher mean on school belonging (2.89 vs. 2.69).⁶⁸
- Students who reported an LGBT inclusive curriculum were also much more likely to feel comfortable talking to their teachers about LGBT issues—about half (55.8%) of the students without an inclusive curriculum felt comfortable compared to three-quarters (75.8%) of students with an inclusive curriculum.⁶⁹

School Policies on Harassment

GLSEN believes that all schools should have comprehensive safe schools policies that protect all students from bullying and harassment, and that the most effective policies are ones that include enumerated categories and explicitly state protection based on personal characteristics including sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. In the 2005 survey, we asked students whether their school had any type of safe school policy and, if so, whether their policy specifically mentioned sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. We examined whether students differed by type of school policy on the two most commonly reported negative indicators of school climate—hearing homophobic remarks and being verbally harassed because of one’s sexual orientation.

Being in a school that has a comprehensive policy about harassment was significantly related to a lower incidence of hearing homophobic remarks in school. As shown in Figure 74, hearing homophobic remarks in school was common across all types of schools. However, students who said their school had a comprehensive policy were less likely to report a high incidence (41.0%) compared to those with no policy (49.2%) and those with a general policy that did not specify sexual orientation or gender identity/expression (51.5%).⁷⁰ Students from schools with comprehensive policies were also less likely to report that they had been verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation. Whereas about 40% of students from schools with no policy or only a general policy reported being verbally harassed frequently, about 30% of students in schools with comprehensive policies reported such frequent harassment (see Figure 75).⁷¹

School Policy and Faculty/Staff Intervention. Comprehensive policies may send a message directly to the student population that bullying and harassment is unacceptable for any reason. Such policies may allow teachers and other school staff to address these negative behaviors more readily or vigilantly in school. For this reason, we examined the relationship between school policy and students’ reports of teachers intervening when homophobic remarks were

Figure 74. Homophobic Remarks and Type of Safe School Policy

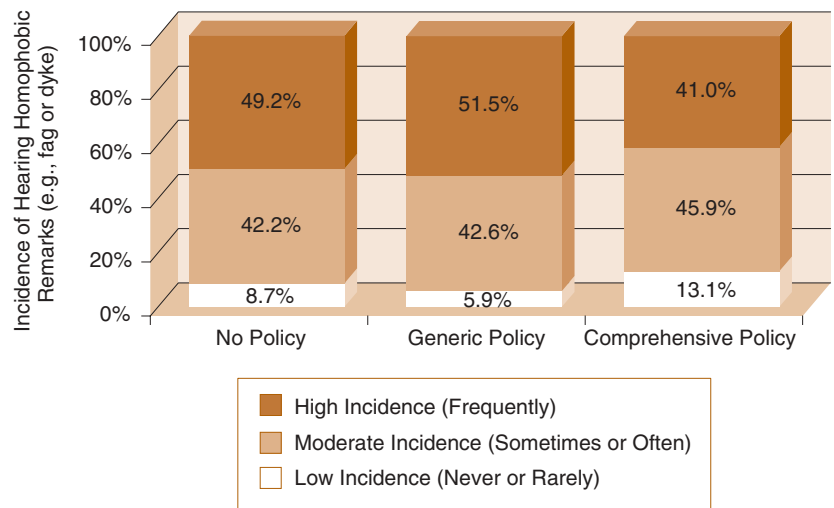


Figure 75. Verbal Harassment re: Sexual Orientation and Type of Safe School Policy

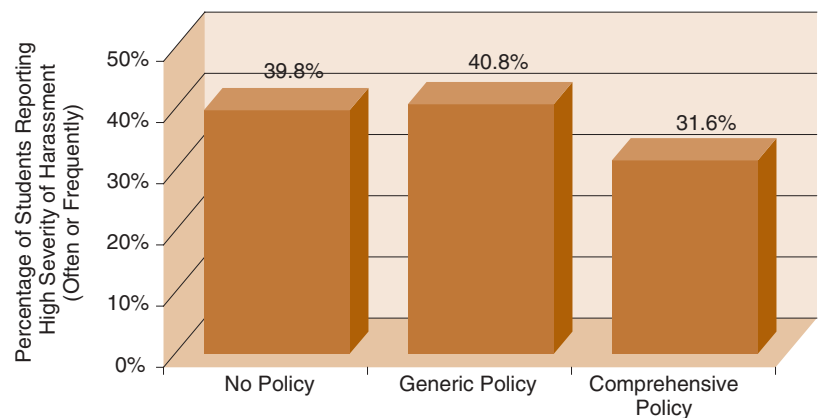
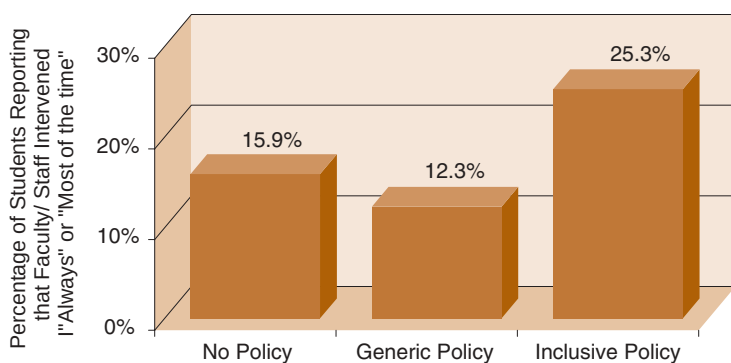


Figure 76. Faculty/Staff Intervention re: Homophobic Remarks and Type of Safe School Policy



made in school, students' behavior in reporting harassment to faculty/staff, and students' reports of how effective school personnel were in intervening when these events were brought to their attention. As shown in Figure 76, significantly more students from schools with comprehensive policies reported that the faculty/staff in their school intervened always or most of the time when homophobic remarks were made (25.3%) compared to students from schools with no policy (15.9%) or a general policy (12.3%).⁷²

Although it was not common for students overall to tell faculty/staff when they had been harassed in school, students from schools with comprehensive policies were more likely to do so. As shown in Figure 77, about a quarter (26.4%) of students from schools with comprehensive policies reported harassment to faculty/staff most of the time or always compared to about 15% of students from schools with no policies or with general policies.⁷³ Furthermore, when students did notify staff, those students from schools with comprehensive policies were more likely to say that the faculty or staff person effectively intervened on their behalf compared to students from other schools without those policies (see Figure 78).⁷⁴

Figure 77. Reporting Harassment to School Personnel and Type of Safe School Policy

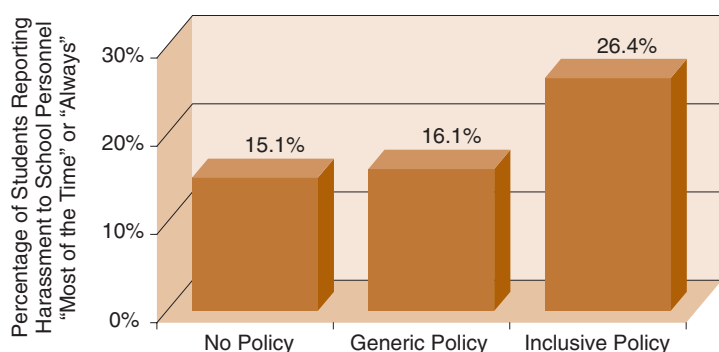
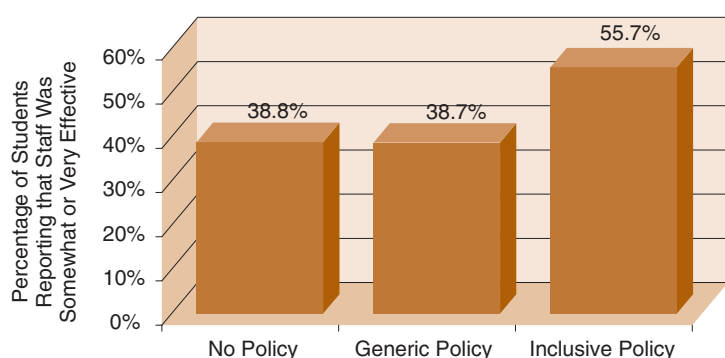


Figure 78. Effectiveness of Faculty/Staff Intervention re: Harassment and Type of Safe School Policy



State Safe School Legislation

A growing number of states across the country have added explicit protections for LGBT students in their state education anti-discrimination and harassment statutes. Currently, nine states plus the District of Columbia prohibit discrimination or harassment on the basis of sexual orientation in schools and four of these states also include protections on the basis of gender identity.⁷⁵ Nine states currently have statewide "anti-bullying" laws that do not explicitly define "bullying" or list categories of students who should be protected from specific and prevalent forms of bullying.⁷⁶

Many safe school advocates believe that general anti-bullying laws are insufficient in protecting students from harassment and discrimination in schools because they are too vague and do not provide teachers and administrators with clear legal guidance. Proponents of the general bullying laws often argue that enumerated categories do

not necessarily provide any extra protection and are not necessary for protective safe schools legislation. As we have seen in this 2005 study, students from schools that have a comprehensive safe school policy that includes sexual orientation and/or gender identity report fewer homophobic remarks in school and report less verbal harassment. Given these differences at the school level, it is important to examine any differential effects of general versus comprehensive bullying legislation. Thus, we examined whether there were differences in students' reports of being harassed because of their sexual orientation based on the presence and type of statewide safe schools legislation. In that several of these states passed their legislation within the past five years, we believed it to be important to examine any changes across these state groups over time using data from the 2001, 2003 and the 2005 National School Climate Surveys.⁷⁷

As shown in Figure 79, there were significant decreases in the frequency of verbal harassment based on sexual orientation among states with comprehensive safe schools legislation.⁷⁸ There were no significant changes over time among students from states with generic bullying laws and those with no laws whatsoever. Furthermore, in 2005, there were no differences between students from states with generic laws and those with no laws in the reported frequency of verbal harassment and both were significantly higher than students from states with comprehensive safe schools legislation.

Although it is logical to think that safe school laws with specific, enumerated categories offer more solid protection as they are explicit regarding whom they protect, there are many legislative battles occurring across the country about this issue. Results from GLSEN's biennial surveys demonstrate that LGBT students in states with comprehensive legislation report less harassment based on their sexual orientation. Furthermore, on these indicators of school climate, states with general anti-bullying laws appeared to offer no greater protection than states with no legislation whatsoever.

Figure 79. Verbal Harassment Based on Sexual Orientation over Time by State Legislative Group

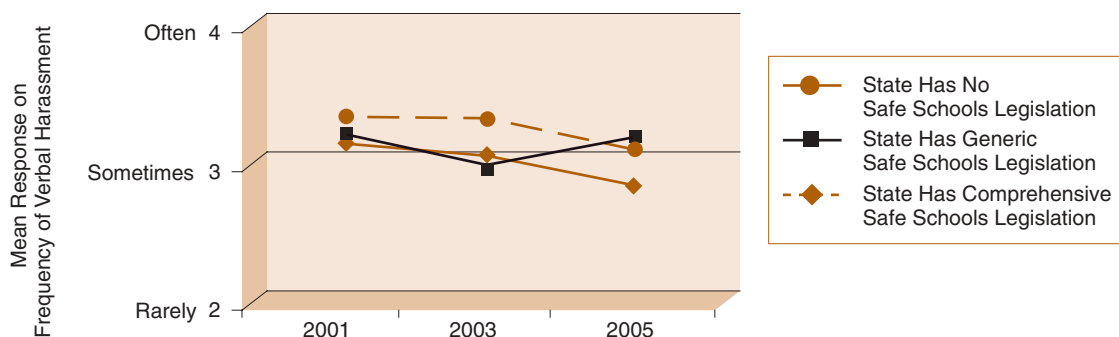
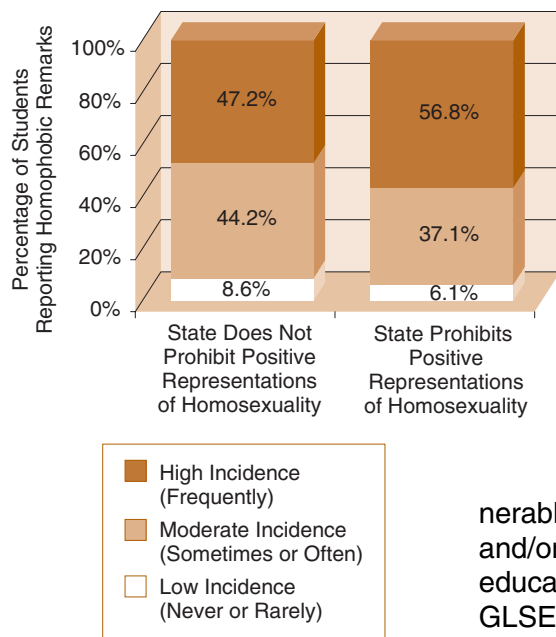


Figure 80. Incidence of Homophobic Remarks and State Laws Prohibiting Positive Representations of Homosexuality in School



Education Laws and Policies that Stigmatize LGBT People

In our discussions of the 2005 survey results thus far, we have seen how a hostile school climate can negatively affect student achievement and educational aspirations. We have also seen how positive school resources, such as comprehensive protective policies and supportive school personnel, can contribute to a better learning environment for LGBT students. However, there are certain state and local policies and laws that may act to stigmatize LGBT people, which in turn, may negatively affect LGBT students and their education.

State Legislation About the Portrayal of Homosexuality in Schools.

Given that most states do not have laws that specifically protect LGBT students in school, the vast majority of students in this country are potentially left vulnerable to in-school harassment based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression. In addition, several states have education laws or policies that may further stigmatize LGBT students. GLSEN's State of the States report reveals that several states have prohibitions on the positive portrayal of homosexuality in schools.⁷⁹ Evidence from the 2005 NSCS showed that this type of negative state legislation may result in an increased hostile school climate for LGBT students when looking at the most common indicators—hearing homophobic remarks and being verbally harassed because of one's sexual orientation. As shown in Figure 80, students from states that prohibit positive representations of LGBT people reported a higher frequency of homophobic remarks in their schools.⁸⁰ Although hearing remarks like “fag” or “dyke” was generally pervasive, students were more likely to report a high incidence of these remarks if they lived in states with the negative legislation (56.8%) than if they lived in states without such legislation (47.2%). Similarly, with regard to the frequency of verbal harassment, students from states with negative legislation were more likely to report a higher frequency than other students.⁸¹ Nearly half (47.6%) of students from negative legislation states reported being verbally harassed frequently or often compared to 37.2% of students from states with no negative legislation.

In addition to the potential for an increased hostile climate for LGBT students, negative school legislation may affect the availability of positive educational resources for LGBT students. As shown in Table 16, students from states that prohibit positive representations of LGBT people were, compared to other students:⁸²

- Nearly half as likely to report having a GSA in their school.
- Less likely to report having Internet access to LGBT community sites from school.
- Twice as likely to report that there were no faculty or staff in their school who were supportive of LGBT students.

As discussed earlier in this section, having affirmative resources in school, such as a GSA or an inclusive curriculum or supportive school personnel, were related to better educational outcomes for LGBT students, such as an increased sense of belonging in school and fewer missed classes. Thus, decreases in these resources as a function of negative state legislation would, in turn, be related to poorer educational outcomes for these students.

Abstinence-Only Sexuality Education. In the 2005 survey, we asked students if their school followed an abstinence-only curriculum⁸³ when providing sexuality or sex education. Existing research has demonstrated that many abstinence-only curricula provide misleading and medically inaccurate information about health matters such as contraception and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy.⁸⁴ Research has also shown that the most commonly used abstinence-only curricula ignore the needs of LGBT youth, who may not receive accurate information about HIV prevention and other sexual health matters.⁸⁵ Given that most commonly used abstinence-only curricula emphasize marriage (federally funded programs are, in fact, required to emphasize marriage as the only appropriate time for sexual relationships), LGBT students also may be taught that they can never have positive, intimate relationships unless they are married (which, at this time, can only happen for LGB adults in Massachusetts).⁸⁶ Furthermore, such biased curricula may foster greater intolerance and further create a negative school environment for LGBT students.

As shown in Figure 81, nearly half of LGBT students reported that their school followed an abstinence-only sexuality education curriculum. Results from our 2005 survey indicated that having an abstinence-only curriculum was, in fact, related to poorer outcomes for LGBT students.⁸⁷

- Students who reported that their school followed an abstinence-only curriculum were more likely to have missed school in the past year because they felt unsafe (33.6% versus 22.7%).⁸⁸

Figure 81. Presence of Abstinence-Only Sex Education Curricula (n=1566)

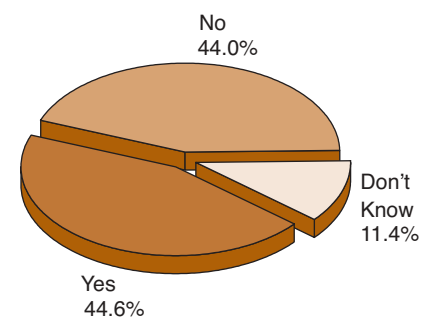


Table 16. School Resources for LGBT Students and State Laws Prohibiting Positive Representations of Homosexuality in School

	State Does Not Prohibit Positive Representations of Homosexuality	State Prohibits Positive Representations of Homosexuality
Gay-Straight Alliances	49.7%	28.0%
Internet Access to LGBT Community Resources	46.0%	31.8%
Absence of Faculty/Staff Supportive of LGBT Students	8.6%	17.5%

- Students who reported that their school followed an abstinence-only curriculum also reported higher levels of harassment based on their sexual orientation, higher levels of sexual harassment and higher levels of relational aggression, i.e., being the target of rumors or lies (see Figure 82).⁸⁹
- We also found that students from abstinence-only schools reported higher levels of religious-based harassment (see also Figure 82). Thus, abstinence-only curriculum may also be related to greater religious intolerance among the student population. As shown in Figure 83, it was students who did not identify as Christian reporting higher levels of religious-based harassment, particularly those who identified as Jewish, Wiccan/New Age, other religions (e.g., Hindu, Muslim, spiritual) or identified as having no religious affiliation.⁹⁰

Students from schools that adhered to an abstinence-only curriculum also reported fewer faculty/staff supports. As shown in Figure 84, they reported having fewer faculty or staff who were supportive of

Figure 82. Abstinence-Only Education and Experiences of Harassment

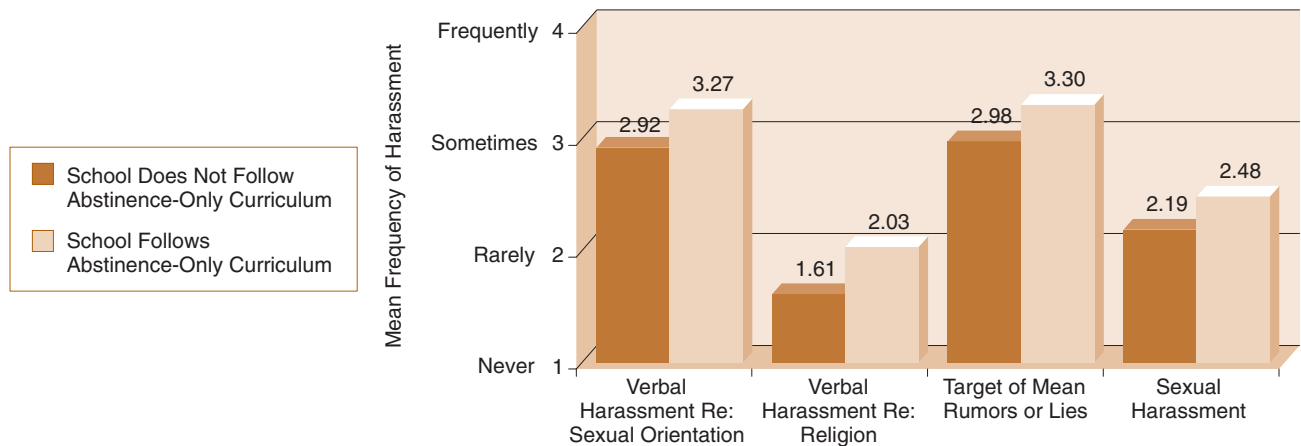
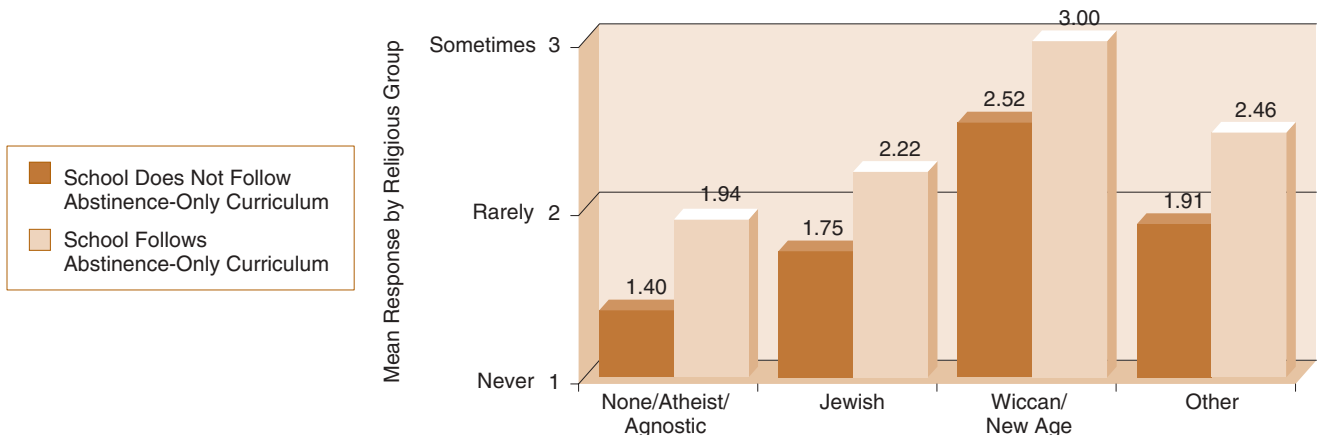


Figure 83. Abstinence-Only Education and Religious Verbal Harassment by Religious Groups
(only those religious groups with a significant difference by education group)



LGBT students. Students who reported that their health class followed an abstinence-only curriculum were also less likely to report that there were “out” LGBT staff at their school.⁹¹ Only about a third (38.3%) of these students could identify at least one “out” LGBT staff person, whereas more than half (54.4%) of students whose school did not follow an abstinence-only curriculum reported at least one “out” staff person. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 85, students who were at a school with an abstinence-only curriculum reported feeling less comfortable talking one-on-one with school personnel. Although the differences were significant for all types of school personnel, it was most profound with regard to principals, school nurses and librarians.⁹² Given that principals are the leaders of the school, it was not surprising that LGBT students would be less comfortable speaking to them if their school had a more restricted curriculum related to discussions of sexuality. LGBT students were less comfortable, in general, speaking to their school nurses and librarians about LGBT issues and this level of comfort was even lower in schools with abstinence-only policies.

Figure 84. Abstinence-Only Education and Number of Supportive Faculty/Staff

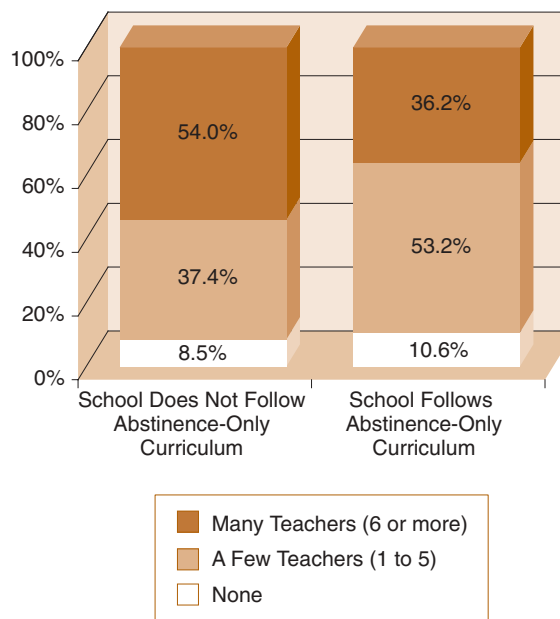
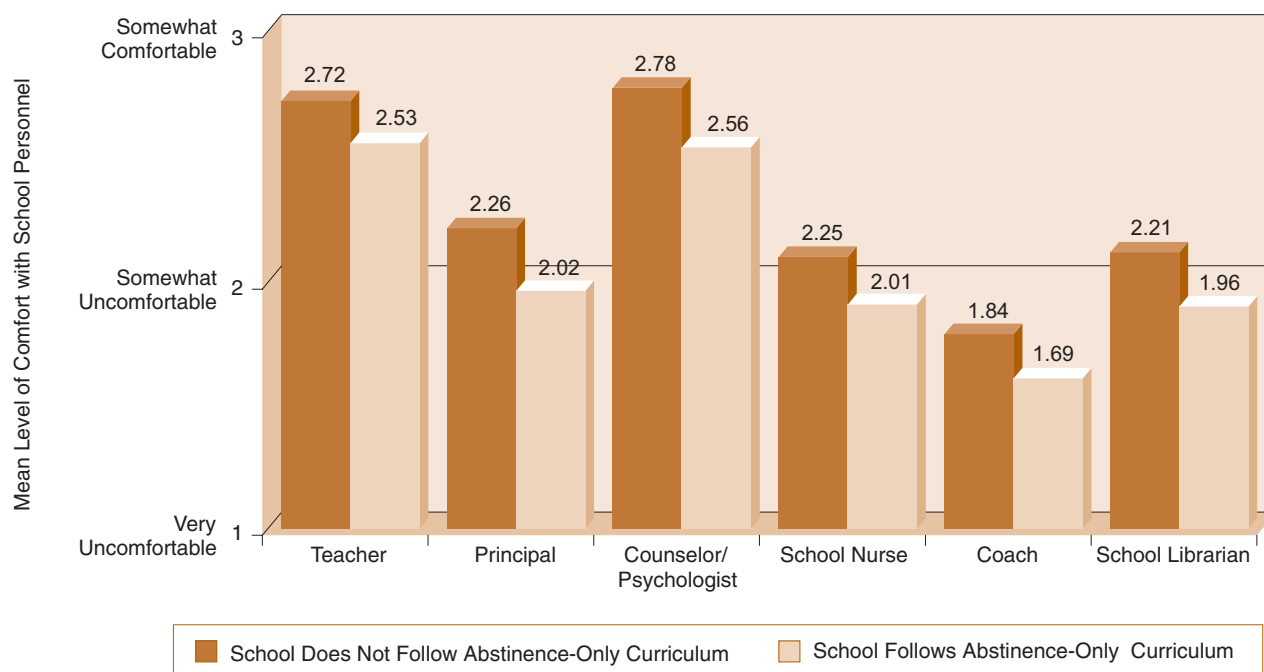


Figure 85. Abstinence-Only Education and Comfort Talking with School Personnel About LGBT Issues



Notes

- 58 Unsafe re: sexual orientation – $\chi^2=48.17$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.17$. Unsafe re: gender expression – $\chi^2=17.13$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.10$.
- 59 $\chi^2=39.54$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.15$.
- 60 To test differences across groups, a one-way analysis of variance and subsequent post-hoc t-test were conducted, the results of which indicated that there were significant differences across all groups – $F(2,1657)=73.87$, $p<.001$.
- 61 To test differences across groups, a one-way analysis of variance and subsequent post-hoc t-test were conducted, the results of which indicated that there were significant differences across all groups – $F(2,1658)=17.01$, $p<.001$.
- 62 $\chi^2=23.88$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.12$.
- 63 Percentages are shown for descriptive purposes. Differences in means of number of days having missed school were tested with a 2x2 analysis of variance. Both the main effects for supportive teachers and harassment were significant – $F(2,1653)=13.14$, $p<.001$ and $F(1,1653)=145.65$, $p<.001$, respectively. The interaction teacher x harassment was also significant – $F(2,1653)=3.28$, $p<.05$.
- 64 Unsafe re: sexual orientation – $\chi^2=8.02$, $df=1$, $p<.01$; $\Phi=.07$. Unsafe re: gender expression – $\chi^2=4.59$, $df=1$, $p<.05$; $\Phi=.05$.
- 65 $\chi^2=20.68$, $df=1$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.11$.
- 66 $t_{(1700)} = -6.74$, $p<.001$.
- 67 $\chi^2=21.21$, $df=1$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.11$.
- 68 $t_{(1699)} = -8.64$, $p<.001$.
- 69 $\chi^2=37.57$, $df=1$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.15$.
- 70 $\chi^2=23.60$, $df=4$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.12$.
- 71 $\chi^2=10.44$, $df=1$, $p<.01$; $\Phi=.08$.
- 72 $\chi^2=29.48$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.14$.
- 73 $\chi^2=22.49$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.12$.
- 74 Of those students who experienced harassment and of those who ever reported it to school personnel ($N=639$): $\chi^2=29.48$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.14$.
- 75 States that include protection based on sexual orientation are: California, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin. States that also include protection on the basis of gender identity are California, Maine, Minnesota, and New Jersey. For more information on state laws as well as a state-by-state analysis of school safety protections, see GLSEN's report, *State of the States 2004: A Policy Analysis of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Safer School Issues*. Available from the GLSEN website: www.glsen.org.
- 76 States that have generic legislation are: Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Oregon, Illinois, New Hampshire and West Virginia. Also see GLSEN's *State of the States 2004* report.
- 77 Given Maine did not pass their legislation until 2005, after data collection for the 2005 survey was completed, they were not included in the Comprehensive group but in the No Legislation group.
- 78 A 3 x 3 multivariate analysis of variance was performed with two independent variables (year and state law group) and three dependent variables (verbal and physical harassment, physical assault regarding sexual orientation), only the Year X Law interaction was significant for verbal harassment $F(4,3425)=3.65$, $p<.01$.
- 79 States that prohibit the positive portrayal of homosexuality in schools include: Alabama, Arizona, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas and Utah. Also see GLSEN's *State of the States 2004* report.
- 80 $\chi^2=7.17$, $df=2$, $p<.05$; $\Phi=.07$.
- 81 $\chi^2=6.77$, $df=1$, $p<.01$; $\Phi=.06$.
- 82 GSAs: $\chi^2=34.91$, $df=2$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.14$, Internet: $\chi^2=15.26$, $df=1$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.11$, and Supportive Faculty/Staff: $\chi^2=16.17$, $df=1$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.10$.
- 83 Survey participants were asked the following question: "In your school health classes, does your school follow an abstinence-only curriculum when teaching sexuality/sex education? For example, were you taught that you are expected to wait until marriage to engage in sexual activity, or that sexual activity outside of marriage is likely to have harmful effects on you?" The examples were based on the federal government's *8-Point Definition of Abstinence-Only Education as Defined by Section 510(b) of Title V of the Social Security Act (Public Law 104-193)*. Available at: www.socialsecurity.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title05/0510.htm
- 84 Santelli, J., Ott, M., Lyon, M., Rogers, J., Summers, D., & Schleifer, R. (2006). Abstinence and abstinence-only education: a review of U.S. policies and programs. *Journal of Adolescence Health*, 3, 72–81, Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SEICUS) (2004). *A Portrait Of Sexuality Education And Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs In The States*. Available at: www.seicus.org/policy/states/index.html, Minority Staff, House Government Reform Committee (2004). *The Content Of Federally Funded Abstinence-Only Education Programs*. Available online at: www.democrats.reform.house.gov/Documents/20041201102153-50247.pdf
- 85 Santelli et al. (2006), SEICUS (2004), Minority Staff, House Government Reform Committee (2004).

- 86 Santelli et al. (2006), Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services (2006). *Community-Based Abstinence Education Program funding opportunity announcement*. Available online at: aaa.acf.hhs.gov/grants/pdf/HHA-2006-ACF-ACYF-AE-0099.pdf
- 87 Subsequent analyses on abstinence-only curriculum compared only those students who reported that their school followed an abstinence-only curriculum and those who reported that their school did not. Students who answered "don't know" were excluded from analyses.
- 88 $\chi^2=20.35$, $df=1$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=.12$.
- 89 To test differences based on whether or not the school used an abstinence-only curriculum, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all harassment and assault variables as dependent variables. The multivariate results were significant – Pillai's Trace=.06; $F(22,1234)=3.25$, $p<.001$. Given the large sample size, we considered statistical significance and effect size in reporting these results.
- 90 A two-way analysis of variance was performed with two independent variables (abstinence-only vs. not abstinence only and Christian vs. non-Christian.) Both main effects and the interaction were statistically significant. (for the main effect, $p<.001$; for the interaction, $p<.05$). Among the non-Christian religious groups, a series of t-test were performed. Of the groups illustrated in Figure 83, all mean differences were statistically significant ($p<.05$), with the exception of the Jewish group, which was marginally significant ($p=.1$).
- 91 $\chi^2=36.11$, $df=1$, $p<.001$; $\Phi=-.16$.
- 92 Differences in mean comfort levels talking to the various types of school personnel was tested with a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with the six school personnel dependent variables. The multivariate results were significant – Pillai's Trace=.02; $F(6,1303)=3.57$, $p<.01$. Resulting t-test analyses were considered significant at a 99% significance level.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The methods used for our survey result in a fairly representative sample of LGBT youth. However, it is important to note that our sample is representative only of youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender and who have some connection to the LGBT community (either through their local youth organization or through the Internet). Thus, we cannot make determinations from our data about the experiences of youth who may be engaging in same-sex sexual activity or be experiencing same-sex attractions but who do not identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Such youth may have experiences that differ from those of youth who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual, they may be more isolated, they may not be aware of supports for LGBT youth, or, even if aware, may not be comfortable using such supports. Similarly, not all youth whose gender identity or gender expression is outside of cultural norms may experience themselves as or identify as transgender or even have the resources to understand what being transgender means. Our data may not reflect the experiences of these youth, who may also be more isolated and without the same access to resources as the transgender youth in our survey. Large-scale population-based studies, such as the YRBS, must include questions about sexual orientation and gender identity and expression because youth who do not presently identify as LGBT but may do so at a later time would be difficult to reach through other means. It is important to remember that our survey reflects the experiences only of LGBT students who were in school during the 2004-2005 school year. Thus, it does not reflect the experiences of students who may have already dropped out of school, whose experiences in school with regard to hostile school climate or access to supportive resources may be very different than those students who have remained in school. An additional limitation worth noting, regarding the racial/ethnic composition of the sample, is that African American students are underrepresented relative to national population statistics. Furthermore, the sample size of the non-white racial/ethnic groups is somewhat small as is the sample of students who identify as transgender. Further research that more specifically examines the school experiences of LGBT African American, Latino/a and other youth of color should be conducted, as should research that examines the experiences of youth who identify as transgender. Lastly, the data from our survey is largely cross-sectional, meaning that the data was collected at one point in time. Thus, with the possible exception of the policy analyses, we cannot determine causality. For example, we cannot make definitive statements regarding the effectiveness of having supportive school staff, although we can say that there was a positive relationship between the number of supportive staff and students' sense of belonging at school.

The results of our 2005 National School Climate Survey demonstrate that school is not always a safe or affirming environment for LGBT students. Hearing biased or derogatory language at school, especially homophobic and sexist remarks, was a common occurrence. Intervention on the part of school staff, however, was not. Teachers

and other school authorities did not often intervene when homophobic or negative remarks about gender expression were made in their presence, and students' use of such language remained largely unchallenged. Three-quarters of the students in our survey reported being made to feel unsafe at school because of at least one personal characteristic, with sexual orientation and gender expression being the characteristics most commonly reported. Almost two-thirds of the students reported that they had been verbally harassed at school because of their sexual orientation, and almost half had been harassed because of how they expressed their gender. In addition, many students reported experiencing incidents of physical harassment related to their sexual orientation or gender expression, sexual harassment, deliberate property damage and cyberbullying.

The findings from the survey remind us that school climate is much more than a safety issue; it is also an issue of a student's right to an education. LGBT students in our survey who experienced frequent harassment because of their sexual orientation reported missing more days of school and having lower GPAs than students who were less often harassed. Thus, steps that schools take to improve school climate are also an investment in better educational outcomes.

Although our results suggest that school climate remains dire for many LGBT students, they also highlight the important role that institutional supports can play in making schools safer for these students. Having supportive educators positively influenced students' sense of belonging, academic performance and aspirations, and their feelings of safety. Students attending schools that had a GSA were less likely to feel unsafe and to miss school for safety reasons, and reported a greater sense of belonging to their school community. Similarly, students who reported positive representations of LGBT issues in their curricula were much less likely to miss school, had a greater sense of belonging and were more likely to feel comfortable talking to their teachers about LGBT issues. Unfortunately, these resources and supports were often not available to LGBT students. Although the majority reported having a supportive teacher or staff person in school, only about half reported having a GSA and very few reported having curricula that were inclusive of LGBT people, history or events. Other resources, such as Internet access to LGBT community resources and LGBT-related materials in the school library, were even less common. Furthermore, students from small towns or rural areas and students from the South were less likely than other students to report having supportive resources at their schools. These findings clearly indicate the importance of advocating for inclusive curricula and resources in schools so that a positive learning environment can be ensured for all LGBT students in all regions and all locales, one in which students can receive a high quality education, graduate and continue on to college.

Findings from the 2005 survey indicate that inclusive school safety policies can result in concrete improvements in school climate for

LGBT students. Students at schools with anti-harassment/bullying policies that included sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression reported a lower incidence of hearing homophobic language and a lower incidence of verbal harassment based on sexual orientation. In addition, faculty and other school staff were more likely to intervene when hearing homophobic remarks, and students were more likely to report incidents of harassment to school authorities when they occurred. Unfortunately, students at schools with comprehensive safe school policies remained in the minority. Although a majority of students said that their school had some type of safe school policy, few said that it was a comprehensive policy that explicitly stated protection based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression.

There were improvements in school climate associated with state-wide safe school legislation as well. For students from states with comprehensive safe school legislation, one that includes enumerated categories of protection, there was a continuous decrease in the rates verbal harassment based on sexual orientation from 2001 to 2005. In contrast, there was no change over time among students in states with general safe school legislation or no legislation whatsoever. In fact, there were no differences in the rates of verbal harassment based on sexual orientation between students from states with general legislation and students from states with no legislation at all. This finding suggests that comprehensive state-wide safe school legislation may provide greater protection than general anti-harassment/bullying laws that do not enumerate categories of protection, such as sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression. Unfortunately, while some states have made progress in implementing this legislation, the majority of our nation's students are not covered by comprehensive legislation.

It is particularly discouraging to note that there has not been consistent progress on the issue of LGBT students' safety in school since our 2003 survey. In fact, the most widespread indicators of a hostile climate for LGBT students—hearing the expression “that’s so gay” used in school and direct verbal harassment because of one’s sexual orientation—remain unchanged since 2001. And in a climate where many states have increasingly sought to ban GSAs specifically, student reports of having a GSA in their school have dropped slightly since 2003.

We have also seen a continued decline in the number of students who report having access to resources through their school library or Internet, and it is important to note the role that the federal government may have played in this decline. The Children’s Internet Protection Act, a law requiring schools that receive federal funds for Internet services or technology to use Internet filtering software, may make it increasingly difficult for students to access information about LGBT people, history and events from their school computers.⁹³ And increased federal funding for abstinence-only education programs in recent years may result in fewer schools allowing LGBT resources in

the school libraries. The role that the federal government may have in the reduction of LGBT-related resources in schools highlights the continued need for advocacy at the federal level for school resources that are inclusive of LGBT issues.

It is clear that there is an urgent need for action to create a safer school climate for all students. There are steps that all concerned stakeholders can take to remedy the situation. The 2005 NSCS illustrates the ways in which the presence of effective legislation or policy and in-school resources and supports can have beneficial effects on school climate, students' sense of safety, and, ultimately, on students' academic achievement and educational aspirations. Therefore, we recommend the following measures:

- Advocate for comprehensive anti-bullying and anti-discrimination legislation at the state and federal level that specifically enumerate sexual orientation and gender identity/expression as protected categories alongside others such as race, faith and age;
- Adopt and implement comprehensive anti-bullying policies in individual schools and districts, with clear and effective systems for reporting and addressing incidents that students experience;
- Support student clubs, such as GSAs, that address LGBT issues in education;
- Provide training for school staff to improve rates of intervention and increase the number of supportive faculty and staff available to students; and
- Increase student access to appropriate and accurate information regarding LGBT people, history and events.

Taken together, such measures can move us towards a future in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

Notes

⁹³ More information about the Children's Internet Protection Act and the ramifications for public school libraries may be found on the American Library Association's website: www.ala.org.